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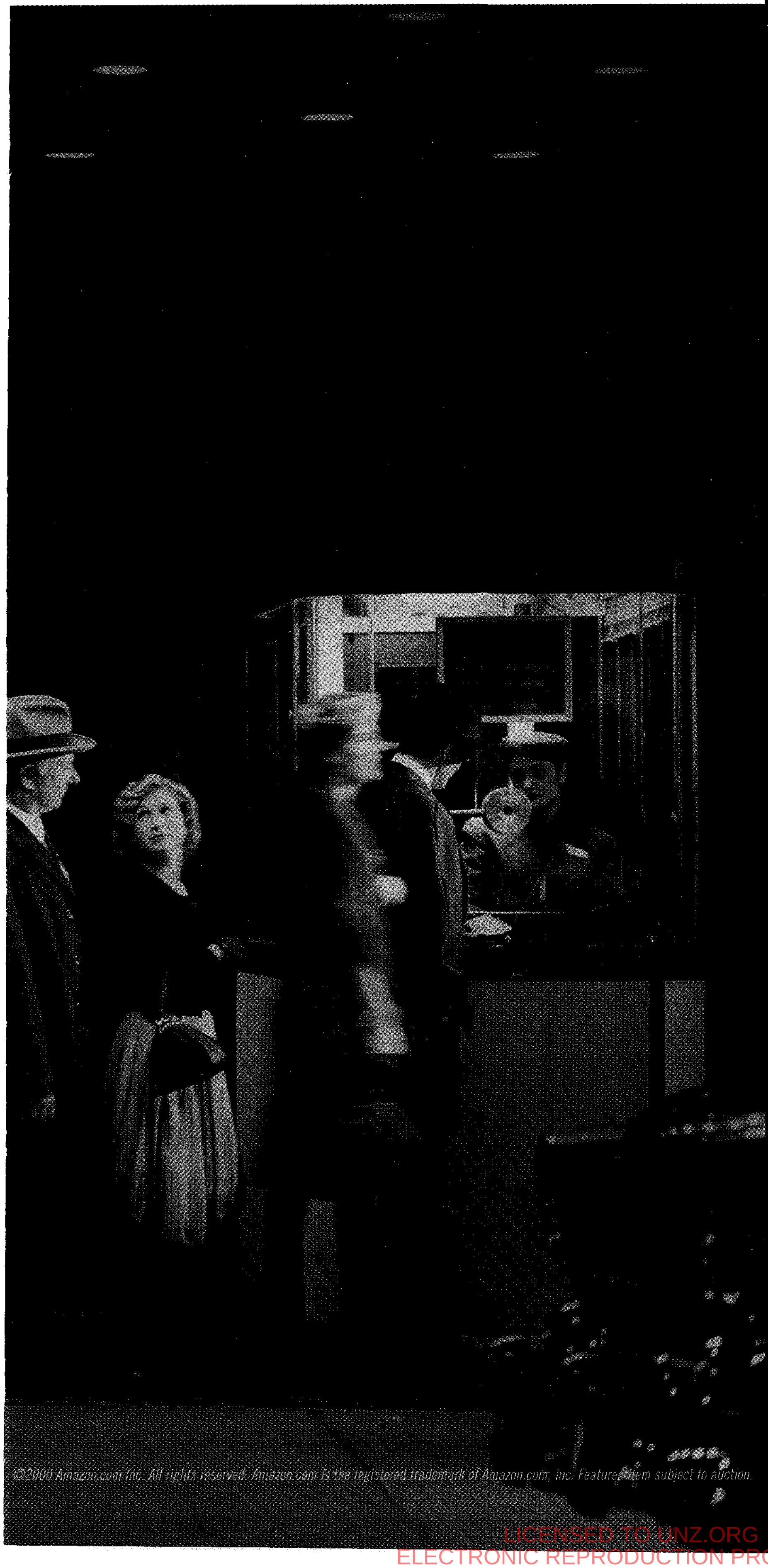

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THE NEW YORKER

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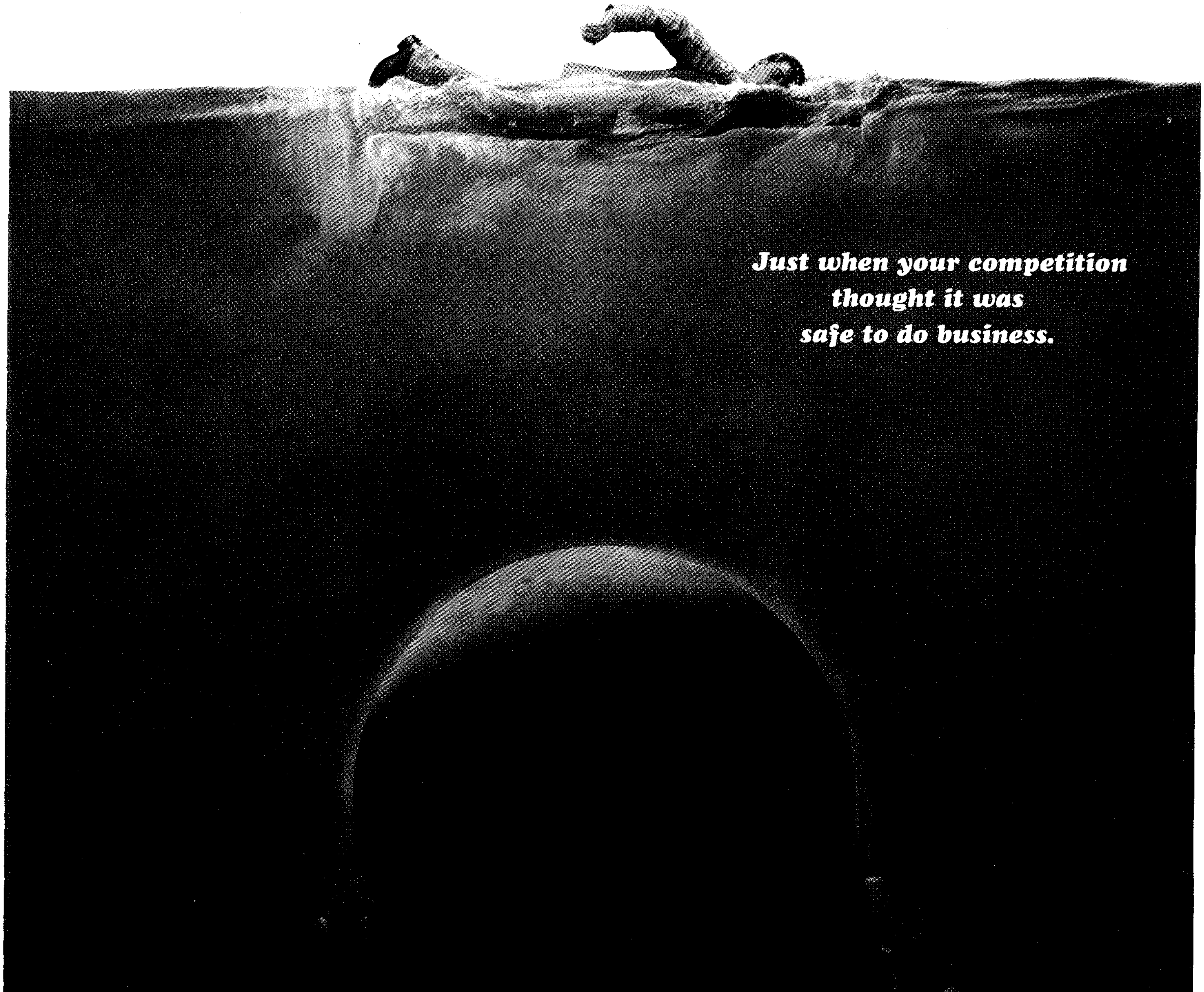

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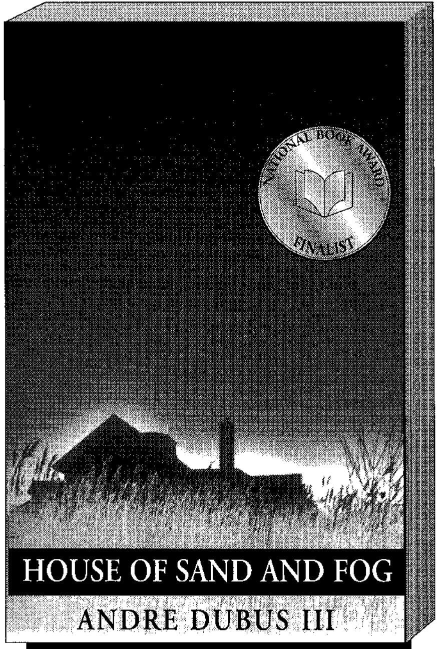

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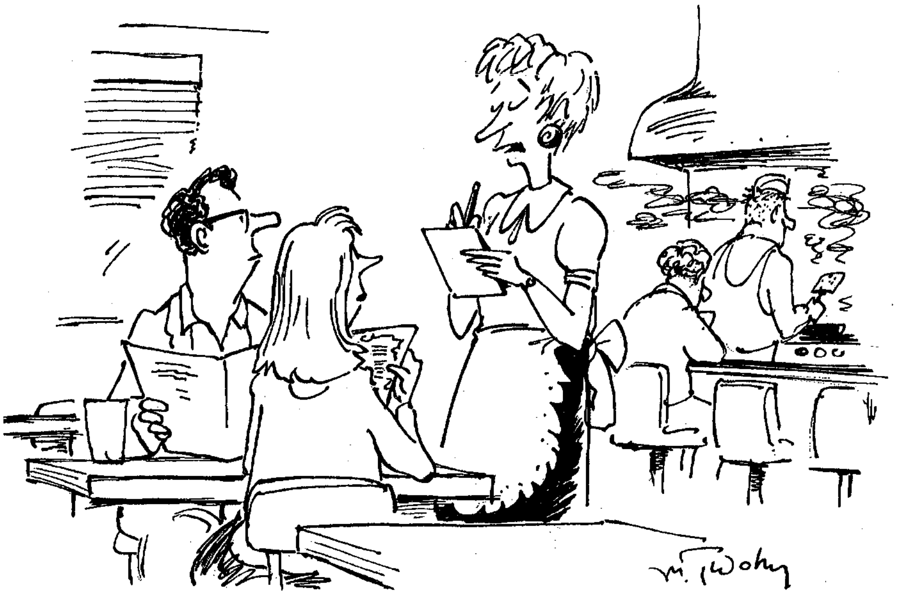

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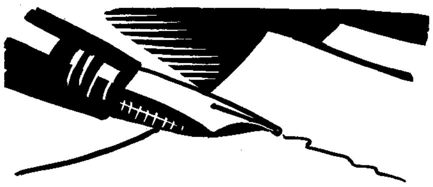

REBEL TALE

Tony Horwitz's article on Nat Turner, "Untrue Confessions" (December 13th), is a good exploration of the complex story of the American slave rebel in history and memory, despite its misleading title. For the past four years, I have been immersed in the world of Nat Turner, and I believe that "The Confessions of Nat Turner" is neither more nor less untrue than most other documents analyzed by historians. It must be read with care to glean the truths within it. While the white lawyer who interviewed Turner in his cell, Thomas R. Gray, clearly shaped many of its elements, the document also contains the voice of Nat Turner. Neither Gray nor any other white observer could have invented the descriptions of Turner's childhood or his extraordinary religious visions. It is only Nat Turner who could have told us about the meaning of the special marks on his body, the religious influence of his grandmother, his vision of light emanating from the hands of Christ in the sky, or his discovery of "drops of blood on the corn as though it were dew from heaven." It would also be incorrect to suggest that the "Confessions" created a myth that Turner was the leader of the rebellion: the blacks and whites of Southampton County did not agree about many things in August of 1831, but they were united in their belief about the central role played by Turner. He may not have been the only African-American to exercise leadership in the rebellion, but his centrality is too heavily documented in other sources to be dismissed as a fabrication of the "Confessions."

KENNETH S. GREENBERG
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Suffolk University
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Tony Horwitz's look at the new scholarship concerning Thomas Gray's "Confessions of Nat Turner" seems to suggest that the view that there was widespread resistance to slavery on the part of the slaves themselves is only now emerging. In fact, the rich history of acts of organized resistance and rebellion has been well documented for many years, most notably by Herbert Aptheker, in his classic book "American Negro Slave Revolts," first published in 1943. Malcolm X once told students that, "of all our studies, history is the best qualified to reward our research." Anyone who reads Aptheker will come away with no illusion that there were any benign characteristics of the institution of slavery, and very aware of continual and widespread resistance on the part of the slaves.

JIM WALTERS
Iowa City, Iowa

THE BOOTY OF SWEDEN

A recent Talk of the Town article (December 20th) refers to the fact that several winners of the Nobel Prize in Economics have recommended the prize's abolition. It is noteworthy that none apparently did so in public before receiving the award and none refused the substantial cash prize. Furthermore, speaking and consulting fees, as well as lucrative memberships on boards of directors, that follow from receiving the prize can provide far more income to winners than does the prize itself. The scarcity value of being a Nobel Prize winner in Economics, and hence the value of having been a recipient, would increase if no more prizes were awarded. Thus, to use economists' jargon, calls by winners for the prize's abolition are consistent with the hypothesis that they are seeking to maximize their own wealth. Even economists act like rational economic men.

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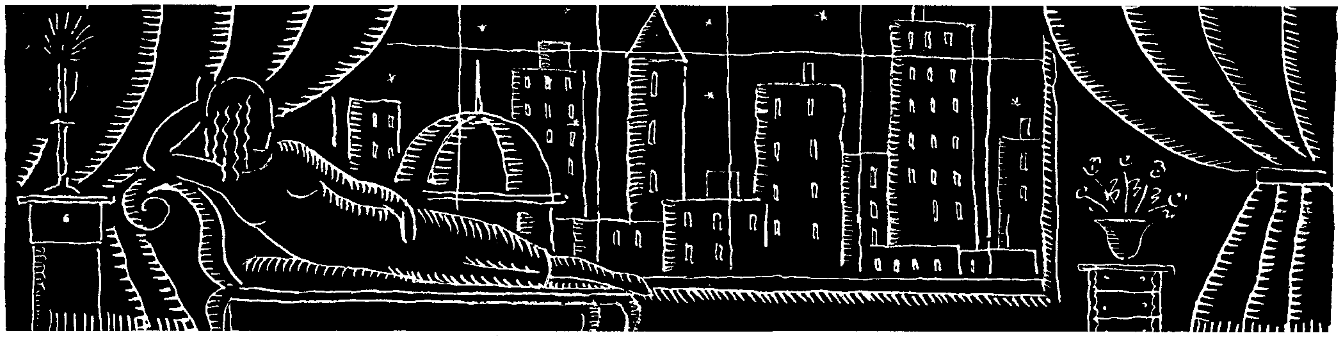

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Arms and the Man—Henry Czerny, Katie Finneran, and Paul Michael Valley lead the cast in a Roundabout Theatre production of Shaw's 1894 play, under the direction of Roger Rees. In previews. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

The Black Milk Quartet—A foursome of music-theatre pieces about the perils of passion: "Actaeon," by Gina Leishman; "Black Milk," by Ellen Maddow; "Price Slasher," by Harry Mann; and "Colored Glasses," by Dan Froot. Previews Jan. 20-22. Opens Jan. 23 at 7 and runs through Feb. 6. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 696-8594.)

Hundreds of Sisters & One Big Brother—Deborah Swisher portrays ten characters in her autobiographical one-woman play, which looks back on her childhood experiences in a California commune. Previews begin Jan. 20. (Harold Clurman, 412 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

The Memoirs of Glückel of Hameln—An adaptation of the seventeenth-century German-Jewish widow's recollections (the first known text in Yiddish by a woman). With music by Frank London, of the Klezmatics, and Adrienne Cooper and puppetry by Jenny Romaine. Opens Jan. 20 at 7:30 and continues through Feb. 6. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 254-6468.)

Saturday Night—Stephen Sondheim's first musical, about a Flatbush man (David Campbell) who leaves Brooklyn in 1929 to seek his fortune on Wall Street and win a débutante's heart. Previews begin Jan. 20. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Amadeus—From London, a revival of Peter Shaffer's drama, starring Michael Sheen as Mozart and David Suchet as Salieri. Sir Peter Hall is the director. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Another American: Asking & Telling—A one-man show written and performed by Marc Wolf, based on his interviews with gay and straight military personnel from the Second World War to the present. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200. Closes Jan. 30.)

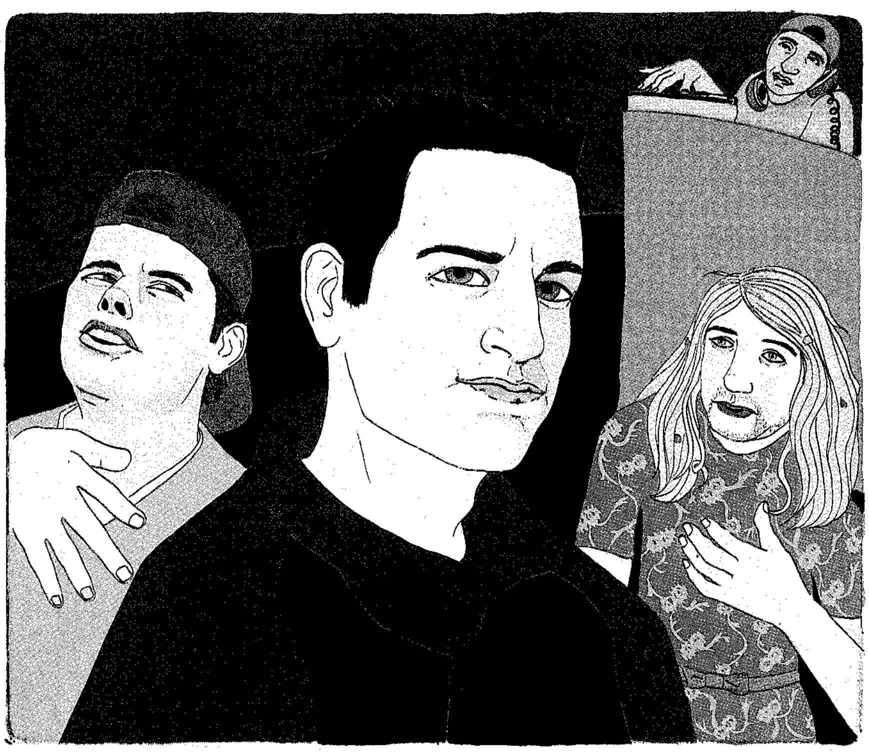
The Bomb-Itty of Errors—A hip-hop adaptation of Shakespeare's "The Comedy of Errors." (45 Bleecker, 45 Bleecker St., at Lafayette St. 307-4100.)

The Countess—Gregory Murphy's play, which tells the story of how the nineteenth-century art critic John Ruskin's wife left him for the painter John Everett Millais, is a vivid exploration of the self-indulgent pleasures of small-mindedness (in this case, Ruskin's and his parents'). The script is funny and intelligent, if a bit overlong, and the cast does a wonderful job of revealing the characters' complete inability to communicate with each other, personally or artistically. (Samuel Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 594-2826.)

Dame Edna: The Royal Tour—Former housewife turned international entertainer Dame Edna Everage (the sublime comic creation of the Australian Dadaist and dandy Barry Humphries) is, to adopt her penchant for alliteration, a virago of vitriol, a harpy of happiness, a megastar of maliciousness. (Reviewed in our issue of 11/1/99.) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Dinner with Friends—Donald Margulies's new play concerns two upper-middle-class couples who have been married for a dozen or so years; one of them survives the wear and tear of marriage, and the other doesn't. It's a perceptive depiction of the mystery and the mundanity of marriage, and the cast give well-rounded performances. Directed by Daniel Sullivan. (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.)

Dirty Blonde—In her hit one-woman show, "Blown Sideways Through Life" (1993), the inimitable Claudia Shear chronicled a series of jobs she'd held (sixty-four of them) to support herself as an actress. Her new play, a wistful and witty paean to Mae West, is also about the rewards of scrappiness. Alternating between scenes from West's struggle to make it in vaudeville, then Hollywood, and from the present-day relationship of a pair of quirky Mae-worshippers, who meet at her grave site, it celebrates both the actress and the idea that you're nothing if you can't be your truest self. Shear, Kevin Chamberlin, and Robert Stillman are all terrific in multiple roles, and though the show goes on just a bit too long, it's worth the wait for a striking tableau in the final scene: a loving kiss between two great big beautiful Maes. New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. Closes Feb. 6.)



"*The Bomb-Itty of Errors,*" *at 45 Bleecker.*

LARA TOMLIN

The Exact Center of the Universe—An amiable comedy by Joan Vail Thorne, lightly seasoned with insight, about a classic Southern dragon-lady mother (Frances Sternhagen, in a beautiful performance). (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

Fully Committed—This hilarious one-man comedy, a tribute to starving actors slaving away in the restaurant "industry" in order to make ends meet, has reopened at a new theatre. Mark Setlock plays a lovable reservations clerk at an unnamed tony Manhattan restaurant, who deals with the daily deluge of calls from dying-to-be-guests. Developed by Setlock and the playwright Becky Mode. (Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

The Idiot—An updated adaptation of the Dostoyevsky novel, starring Stass Klassen and

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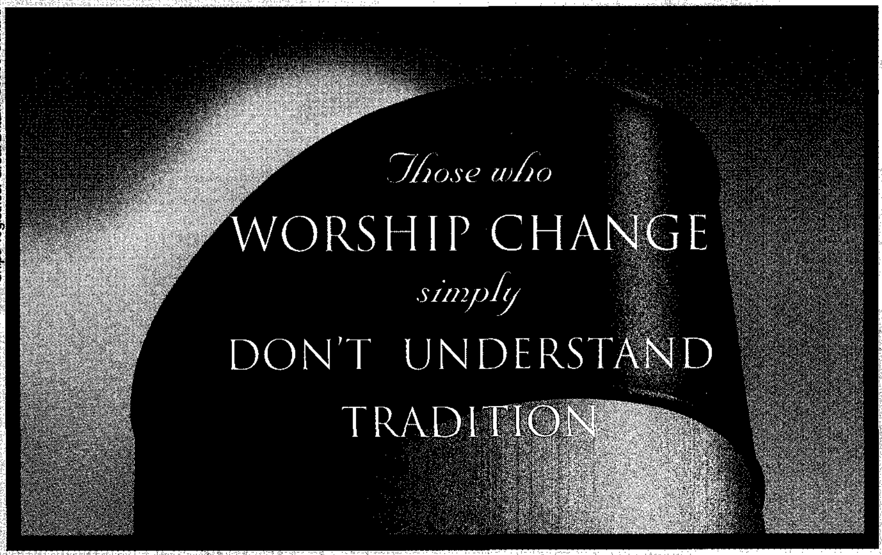

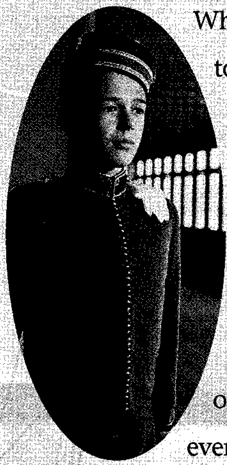

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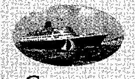

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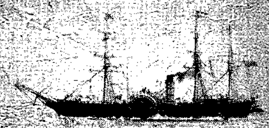

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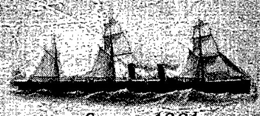

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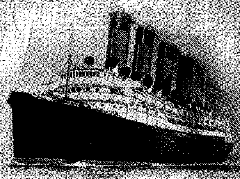

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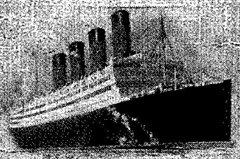

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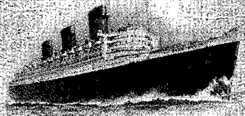

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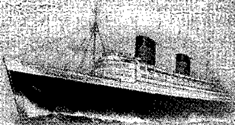

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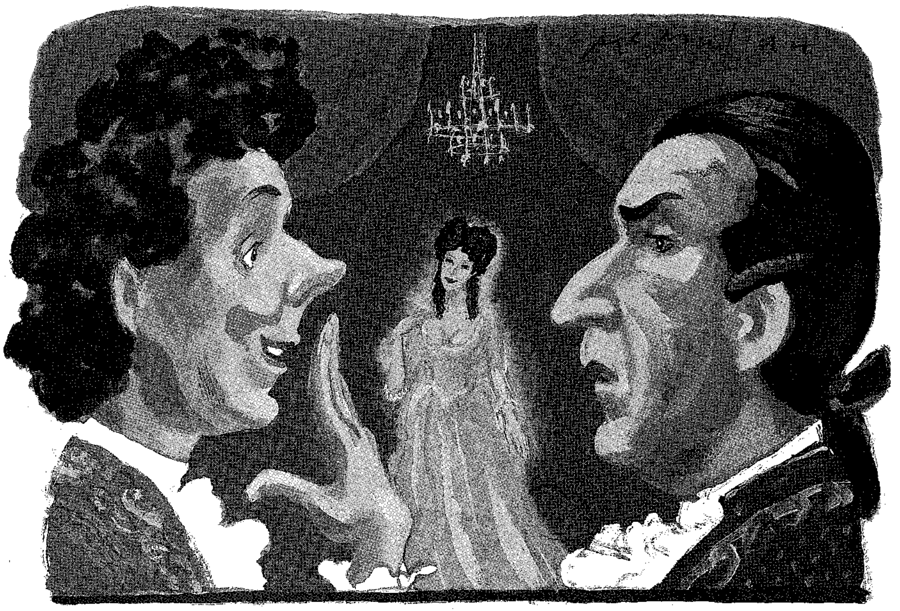
Inappropriate—A rock musical based on true stories from the lives of teens. (Theatre Row Theatre, 424 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Infrared—Mac Wellman's new play, performed by the troupe Fancy Pants, was inspired by Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market" and the stories of Edward Gorey. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-0051. Closes Feb. 5.)



Michael Sheen and David Suchet, in "Amadeus," at the Music Box.

JAMES MCMULLAN

The Irish . . . and How They Got That Way—A revue by Frank McCourt, author of the best-selling memoir "Angela's Ashes." It's a generally good-natured if somewhat choppy amalgam of historical tidbits, quotations from letters and speeches, and Irish songs from the past two centuries. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes Jan. 30.)

Jackie Mason: Much Ado About Everything—The comic is back on Broadway with a new show, in which he explores the problems with Bill Gates, the Internet, Y2K, Bill and Hillary, Rudy Giuliani, and Jesse Ventura, among others. (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

James Joyce's The Dead—Playwrights Horizons' musical version of the short story has moved to Broadway's Belasco Theatre for a limited-run encore engagement. (11/8/99) (111 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Kiss Me, Kate—This revival of the Cole Porter musical, a play within a play about the backstage goings on of a production of "The Taming of the Shrew," represents the highest level of theatrical collaboration currently on Broadway. The hero is the veteran British director Michael Blakemore, whose success lies to a large extent in marshalling the talents of his production team, resulting in the theatrical equivalent of a field day. And yet, with all its admirable expertise and its various delights, the production is oddly earthbound: it comes down to the vexing issue of chemistry. The leads, Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell, are expert players, but they are not—in the true meaning of the words—star performers, the kind who bring something larger than life to musical stories. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Lobster Alice—A comedy by Kira Obolensky, set in mid-forties Hollywood, in which the arrival of Salvador Dali (David Patrick Kelly) inspires a creatively blocked animator (Reg Rogers) and his assistant (Jessica Hecht). (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200. Closes Jan. 23.)

The Merry Wives of Windsor—The Pearl Theatre Company's staging of Shakespeare's comedy. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

North Atlantic—Willem Dafoe, Kate Valk, and Steve Buscemi star in the Wooster Group's multimedia play, set aboard an aircraft carrier during the Cold War. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

Our Sinatra—A revue of the songs of Frank, starring Eric Comstock, Christopher Gines, and Hilary Kole. (Blue Angel, 323 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

The Price—In Arthur Miller's 1968 play, a failed, dutiful brother, who thinks that life has given him a bad deal, cuts another bad deal, this time with a furniture dealer. But when his successful sibling turns up, the play becomes a negotiation about their family history, an agreement that can't be reached. As the rivalry is played out, the audience watches the riveting spectacle of a man clinging to a self-destructive illusion, despite all evidence to the contrary. As a metaphor for our culture of complaint, it ain't bad. And neither are the performances. "The Price" is not a waste of time, which is saying a lot on Broadway these days. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Putting It Together—A revue celebrating the songs of Stephen Sondheim, starring Carol Burnett. Directed by Eric D. Schaeffer. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

The Rainmaker—As wholesome and satisfying as a glass of milk, N. Richard Nash's 1954 drama is a sunny, old-fashioned valentine of a play that hits on big themes (loneliness, trust, love) with a light touch. Starbuck, played by an exuberant Woody Harrelson, is a flashy evangelist of rain who arrives at a family farm in the throes of drought and dissatisfaction; he inadvertently solves both problems with a confidence game that works out for everyone. Jayne Atkinson is wonderful as the sensible spinster who tries to resist Starbuck's charms, as are Randle Mell, as her stiff would-be suitor, and Jerry Hardin, as her well-intentioned father. A confection, a delight. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100. Closes Jan. 23.)

Saturday Night Fever—The musical, based on the 1977 film. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Sex—The 1926 show that launched Mae West's career by putting her in jail. She wrote and starred in this brazen melodrama, about a prostitute who's on the lookout for a rich man but finds happiness instead. The play is certainly dated, but the cast is game and the evening is fun; the double- (and single-) entendre songs that open the second act are a real delight. The director, Elyse Singer, does a fine logistical job in very tight quarters, but she adds distracting snippets from West's trial to the script, as a prologue to each act. Mae West, even incarnated by someone else (in this case, Carolyn Baeumler), doesn't need explaining. (Gershwin Hotel Living Room, 7 E. 27th St. 439-8112. Closes Jan. 31.)

Sexual Perversity in Chicago—The Atlantic Theatre Company's all-Mamet season continues with the playwright's 1976 comedy, accompanied by his 1976 one-act "Duck Variations." (336 W. 20th St. 645-1242.)

Some Assembly Required—The Target Margin Theatre's festival of new plays includes stagings of five works in progress: "Zulu Pet," by Kent Alexander; "Dick in London," by Cahir O'Doherty; "Innocent," by Nicholas Ridout; "Rook," by Kathy Hemingway Jones; and "The Anti-Muse," by Michael Brodsky. (Present Company Theatorium, 198 Stanton St. 358-3657. Closes Jan. 30.)

Stopless—A mother, her two sons, and a stripper make up the cast of characters in a new play by David Deblinger. (Center Stage, 48 W. 21st St. 929-2228. Closes Jan. 29.)

Swing!—A musical salute to the genre, directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Teahouse of the August Moon—From the Pan Asian Rep, John Patrick's 1953 play about post-Second World War Japan, adapted from the novel by Vern Sneider. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 279-4200.)

This Is a Test—A solo show written and performed by Michael D. Conway, in which a man looks back on his life on the night before receiving H.I.V.-test results. (Sanford Meisner, 164 Eleventh Ave., at 22nd St. 613-1682.)

The Vagina Monologues—Eve Ensler's one-woman show is based on interviews she conducted with two hundred women about their vaginas. There's a certain amount of shtick involved, but most of the stories she tells are touching and memorable. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Velvetville—The latest solo puppet play by Paul Zaloom. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Closes Jan. 23.)

The Voysey Inheritance—The Mint Theatre presents an encore engagement of Harley Granville-Barker's 1905 drama, which the company originally staged last spring. (311 W. 43rd St. 315-0231. Closes Feb. 13.)

Waiting in the Wings—In the best of Noël Coward's postwar plays, old gallant theatricals duke it out in a retirement home, where they fire off some terrific one-liners. The set is too spick-and-span for musty England in the sixties, and some of director Michael Langham's casting leaves a bit to be desired, but the evening has its old-time pleasures. Although the play itself is somewhat creaky, the pros who bring it to life here aren't: Bette Henritze, Elizabeth Wilson, Rosemary Harris, Dana Ivey, and the evergreen Lauren Bacall. La Bacall is just too glamourous and too famous for the faded company her character keeps; the day she goes to the retirement home is the day gallstones become jewelry. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

War of the Worlds—The Saratoga International Theatre Institute's staged version of Howard Koch's radio play, based on the H. G. Wells novel and made famous in 1938 by Orson Welles and the Mercury Theatre. Jan 19-20 at 8. (West Bank Café, 407 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Wrong Mountain—A new play by David Hirson ("La Bête"), starring Ron Rifkin as a bitter, unknown poet determined to demonstrate how easy it is to make it as a playwright. (Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

Y2K—As up to the minute as the Melissa virus and the Explore.Zip worm, Arthur Kopit's drama brings news of the cyber-abuse of privacy and shows us how personal history can be rewritten at a computer hacker's whim. Underneath the cyber-thriller aspect of the story, Kopit's sense of the bewildering mystery and fragility of relationships comes through loud and chillingly clear. (12/20/99) (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200. Closes Jan. 23.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN: Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St. 307-4747. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FOOTLOOSE:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **FOSSE:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200 . . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS:** John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000. . . . **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **WIT:** Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.

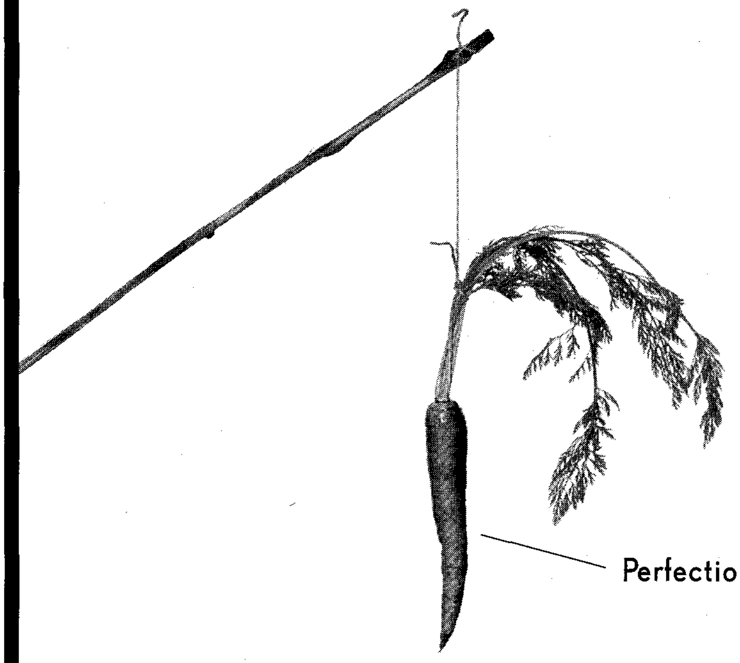
DANCE

New York City Ballet—Jan. 19 at 8: "Swan Lake." . . . ¶ Jan. 20 at 8: "Mozartiana," "Episodes," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 8: "Concerto Barocco," "Tchaikovsky Pas de Deux," "In the Night," and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 2: "Concerto Barocco," "Episodes," and "Agon." . . . ¶ Jan. 22 at 8: "Episodes," the première of Twyla Tharp's untitled ballet, and "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet." . . . ¶ Jan. 23 at 3: "Fancy Free," "Barber Violin Concerto," and "Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 2." . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 8: "Divertimento No. 15," the untitled Tharp work, and "In the Night." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through Feb. 27.)

Stuttgart Ballet—The sixty-eight-member company, under the direction of Canadian Reid Anderson, performs repertory works by company founder John Cranko and new works by such younger choreographers as Kevin O'Day, Mauro Bigonzetti, and the former Stuttgart dancer Uwe Scholz. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Jan. 19-22 at 8.)

"Altogether Different"—Three weeks of performances by seven contemporary-dance companies, with programs that, in every case, include a New York première and often additional seasoned works. Jan. 18 and Jan. 22 at 8 and Jan. 23 at 2: **YOSHIKO CHUMA & THE SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS** in "Footprints of War" and "Reverse Psychology: Agenda One: Japan." . . . ¶ Jan. 19 at 8: **SARA PEARSON/PATRIK WIDRIG AND COMPANY** in "HereAfter." . . . ¶ Jan. 20 at 8 and Jan. 23 at 7:30: **DANCE BY NEIL GREENBERG,** in "This Is What Happened" and "Sequel." . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 8: **PASCAL RIOULT DANCE THEATRE** in "K99," "Tombeau," "The Oak and the Reed," and "Wien." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

"Unconscious Landscape"—The French choreographer Marion Ballester collaborates with video artist Pouran Esrafily on a quartet performed in the presence of a sculpture by



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Friday, January 21 at 8:00
Mikhail Pletnev, conductor
Boris Berezovsky, piano
Tchaikovsky: Le Voyevode, Op.3: Overture
Tchaikovsky: Piano Concerto No.2
Scriabin: Reverie
Scriabin: The Poem of Ecstasy
(Symphony No.4), Op.54
Pre-concert lecture by Ellon Carpenter
at 7:00, Kaplan Penthouse
Tickets: $47/37/25 Avery Fisher Hall

Sunday, January 23 at 3:00
Mikhail Pletnev, conductor
Kyung Wha Chung, violin
Rachmaninoff: Isle of the Dead
Prokofiev: Violin Concerto No.2
Scriabin: The Divine Poem
(Symphony No.3)
Pre-concert lecture by Ellon Carpenter
at 2:00, Kaplan Penthouse
Tickets: $47/37/25 Avery Fisher Hall

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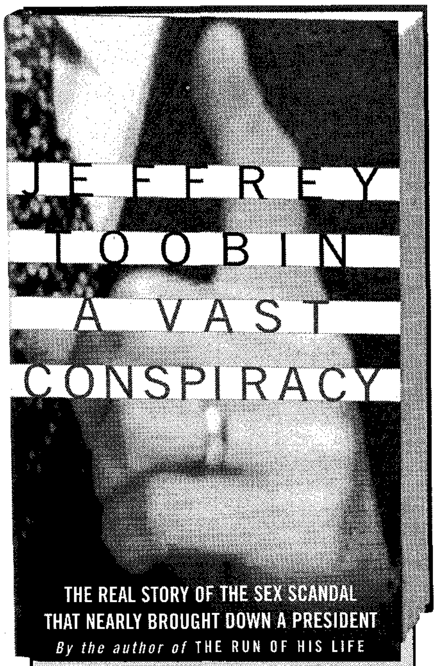
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THE REAL STORY OF THE SEX SCANDAL
THAT NEARLY BROUGHT DOWN A PRESIDENT
By the author of THE RUN OF HIS LIFE

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A VAST CONSPIRACY

THE REAL STORY OF THE SEX SCANDAL THAT NEARLY BROUGHT DOWN A PRESIDENT

by Jeffrey Toobin

* * * * * * * * * *

To read the never-before-seen documents from the Clinton scandals, visit www.vastconspiracy.com

RANDOM HOUSE

Louise Bourgeois ("Gathering Wool," installed for the performance in the St. Mark's sanctuary). The accompanying video projections were taken in the artist's studio. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8112. Jan. 20-21 at 8:30 and Jan. 22 at 7:30.)

"Wrapped"—The Israeli-born choreographer Inbal Pinto presents an evening-length work that matches fairy-tale plot twists and surrealist grotesqueries (Siamese twins, white-robed dwarves, gangs of tragicomedians) with a score made up of stride piano, heavy percussion, and Beethoven. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. Jan. 19-21 at 8.)

"Breakdown"—The choreographer Nicholas Leichter offers six works, including "Good Cop/Bad Cop," a duet with Clare Byrne, and "Worth," a sextet of touchingly awkward erotic dancers. (The Flea, 41 White St. 226-0051. Jan. 20-23 at 8. Through Jan. 30.)

"Social Dances"—The Jody Oberfelder Dance Projects presents playful variations on touch dancing, from the waltz to the lambada. (Dixon Place at Vineyard 26, 309 E. 26th St. 532-1546. Jan. 21-22 at 8 and Jan. 23 at 3. Through Jan. 30.)

"Dance on Camera 2000"—As part of the Lincoln Center festival devoted to dance film and videos, the dance critic Elizabeth Kendall introduces a suite of works on Russian dancers: "Yuri Soloviev: I'm Tired of Living in my Native Land"; profiles of Galina Ulanova, Svetlana Zakharova, and Natalia Dudinskaya; and "Adolescence," about the relation betwen a Russian-émigré ballet mistress and her prize student. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. 875-5610. Jan. 21 at 6:30. For further schedule information, see Films—Revivals, Classics, Etc.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

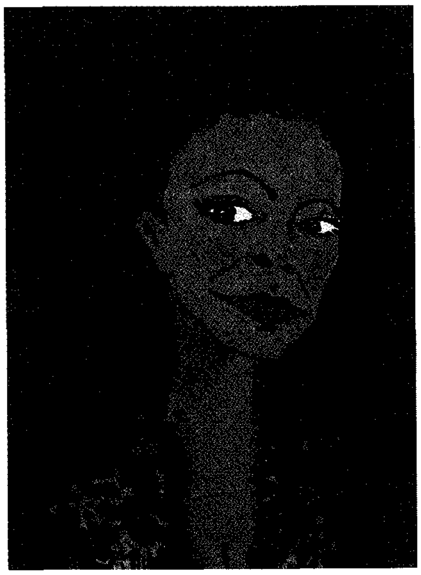
Billy Taylor Trio—Taylor's piano work mirrors his personality, which is sturdy, erudite, and resolutely mainstream. Epiphanies may be few, but quality is a foregone conclusion. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 879-5500. Jan. 20 at 7.)

Carnegie Hall Jazz Band—Benny Goodman's name is almost synonymous with the Swing Era, but his fellow-clarinet bandleaders of the thirties, Artie Shaw and Woody Herman, were right up there in the pantheon as well. While Herman was an unspectacular player whose greatest claim to fame was his refusal to ossify—he continually introduced new material and cultivated new talent—Shaw was a brilliant and original stylist whose musical gifts were sometimes overshadowed by his marriages (six in all, to the likes of Lana Turner and Ava Gardner). In this tribute concert to the two men, Dick Johnson, the clarinettist who has led the Artie Shaw "ghost" band since 1983, will once again attempt to capture Shaw's inimitable sound. (Shaw, who turns ninety in May, has not played the clarinet publicly since retiring in 1955 to become a writer.) Ken Peplowski, a soaring clarinettist who could outplay Herman in his sleep, is the other guest soloist. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. Jan. 20 at 8.)

Jazz at Lincoln Center—The Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra gets on the Cuban tip with a program featuring the expatriate saxophonist and clarinettist Paquito D'Rivera and the piano virtuoso Chuco Valdés, who still hangs his hat in Havana. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Jan. 20 and 22 at 8. . . . ¶ Lehman College Concert Hall, the Bronx. 718-960-8833. Jan. 21 at 8.)

Michael Blake & Free Association—Saxophonist and composer Blake fits right in among the circle of smart and ambitious free-thinkers who make up the Jazz Composers Collective. Some of the most imposing players in the group will join Blake, including bassist Ben Allison (Blake's boss in the band Medicine Wheel) and drummer Matt Wilson. (Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. 708-9480. Jan. 21 at 5:30.)

TLC—In 1999, one of hip-hop's finest trios released the irresistible single "No Scrubs," and then proceeded to disintegrate in an ugly melee of internal name-calling. Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes even left the group in a snit; now she's back, and by all accounts Lopes and bandmates Tionne "T-Boz" Watkins and Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas are set to churn out an evening of buttery R. & B. With Christina Aguilera. Proving that the marketplace can embrace more than one pubescent bad-girl singer, this contender for Britney Spears's teen-pop crown turns out to be a first-rate singer with second-rate material. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Jan. 21 at 8.)



SWEET RETURNS: *When Teri Thornton released her début album, "Devil May Care," in 1961, the pianist and singer seemed too good to be true, with her mellifluous blend of Sarah Vaughn's control, Ella Fitzgerald's swing, and Dinah Washington's swaggering insouciance. But family responsibilities and the vagaries of the recording industry derailed Thornton's career and she slipped into obscurity, playing the piano-bar and lounge circuit for the next three decades. Following a successful battle with cancer, Thornton made an unexpected comeback by winning the 1998 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Vocals Competition. Last year's album, "I'll Be Easy to Find," demonstrated that Thornton's opulent voice was intact. On standards and sassy originals she bites lustily into phrases; each syllable becomes a celebration of hard-won second chances. Last fall a Village Vanguard gig was scheduled, only to be cancelled because of illness. Now an altogether ready, willing, and consummately able Thornton is opening on January 18 at the Vanguard, where she'll prove that her nearly forty-year gap was merely an extended intermission.*

ELIZA GRAN

CLUBS

(Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Bam Café, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Jan. 20: **CHOCOLATE GENIUS** is Marc Anthony Thompson, a songwriter and vocalist with a gift for incisive personal narratives and an emotionally keyed-up delivery. His backing band includes the groovy downtown guitarist **OREN BLOEDOW.**

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Jan. 21: A night of screaming rock and roll with San Diego's **ROCKET FROM THE CRYPT** and New Jersey's **SWINGIN' NECKBREAKERS.** Jan. 24: **CATATONIA.** This Welsh quintet, featuring the fetching lead singer Cerys Matthews, specializes in chirpy and undemanding guitar rock. Jan. 25: Better-than-average rap with the **JUNGLE BROTHERS.**

Fez, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—Jan. 22: The quiet and wholesome folk-pop of **INNOCENCE MISSION,** a trio formed thirteen years ago by high-school friends from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The ethereal voice of lead singer Karen Peris summons up the halcyon innocence of America before the sixties. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Jan. 19: An extremely rare New York City club appearance by country singer turned archivist **ALAN JACKSON,** whose latest album, "Under the Influence," includes such classics as "Pop a Top," "Revenooer Man," and "Kiss an Angel Good Mornin'." If you can't get to Nashville, this concert should be the next best thing. Jan. 22: **FUNKY METERS.** Founded in the mid-sixties by keyboardist Art Neville, this strutting gumbo band is to New Orleans R. & B. what the MGs are to Memphis soul—the real thing.

Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Jan. 25: One of the hardest-working backup singers in the business, **PAULETTE MC WILLIAMS** has filled out tracks by such artists as Aretha Franklin, Quincy Jones, Boz Skaggs, and Luther Vandross. Her warm, soulful voice promises to chase away any hint of winter's chill.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—The New York Festival of Electronic Composers and Improvisers opens Jan. 18 with three of the genre's creators. The sixty-eight-year-old accordionist and composer **PAULINE OLIVEROS** founded the Deep Listening movement, an aesthetic that pays equal attention to environmental sounds and the trance-inducing music Oliveros favors. She's joined by multimedia and computer innovator **MORTON SUBOTNICK,** whose widly influential 1967 album, "Silver Apples of the Moon," is credited as the first electronic work commissioned by a recording company, and violinist and minimalist composer **TONY CONRAD.** Jan. 19: The ubiquitous producer **JIM O'ROURKE** joins percussionist **CHARLES K. NOYES** and electric harpist **ZEENA PARKINS.** Jan. 20: Detroit techno d.j. **CARL CRAIG** and **JONAH SHARP** and friends. Jan. 21-22: **SUICIDE.** When the seminal electro-punk duo of Alan Vega and Martin Rev first began performing in the early seventies, they were reviled as much as they were loved, mostly as a result of their controversial, and confrontational, onstage demeanor. For some people, like the Cars' lead singer, Ric Ocasek, the band was a revelation; Ocasek produced the band's 1977 début album and singer Vega's 1983 solo outing, "Saturn Strip." Though the group is now mostly defunct, Suicide remains aggressively annoying whenever they get together. With Finnish electronica duo **PAN SONIC.** Jan. 23: **THE SILVER APPLES** and **DJ FOOD** close out the festival with a final night of bleeps, drones, and electronic humming.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Jan. 19: **ROCKET FROM THE CRYPT** and the **SWINGIN' NECKBREAKERS** (see the Bowery Ballroom). Jan. 22: **MARK EITZEL.** Best known as the erstwhile leader of San Francisco's late and lamented American Music Club, Eitzel's bittersweet songwriting combines a tenderloin heart with buckets of Tom Waits's poetry. His solo concerts are usually a good workout for the tear ducts.

Rodeo Bar, 375 Third Ave., at 27th St. (683-6500)—Jan. 22: **HANK WILLIAMS III** joins the family business, crooning about drinking, cheating, and lost loves.

Wetlands, 161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—Jan. 21-22: The Southern-flavored rock and roll of the **SCREAMIN' CHEETAH WHEELIES.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Jan. 19-22: The **STANLEY TURRENTINE** quintet. You judge a tenor saxophonist like Turrentine not by his virtuosity or his invention but by his sound—in this case, a huge, rounded calling card of warm, gritty soul.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Jan. 23: Vocalese, the practice of putting lyrics to the melodies of recorded improvised instrumental solos, is an acquired taste—it's tongue-twisting gibberish to some, high art to others. The dapper **JON HENDRICKS** and the elegant **ANNIE ROSS** are just about the best practitioners of the technique, having put it on the map with their legendary trio, Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, and they're keeping the tradition alive in high style. Dining.

Feinstein's at the Regency, 540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (339-4095)—Jan. 19-Feb. 14: The **JOHN PIZZARELLI** trio, with special guest **BUCKY PIZZARELLI.** John Pizzarelli is an exceedingly talented singer, guitarist, and bandleader; his father, Bucky, on the other hand, is the acknowledged master of the seven-string

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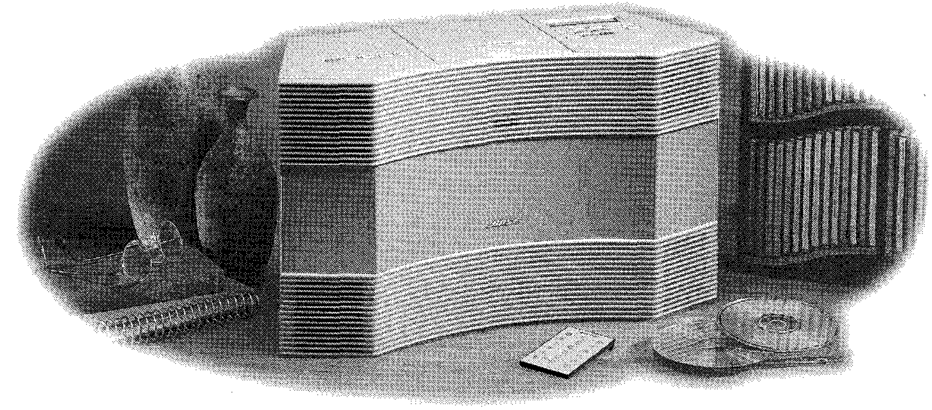

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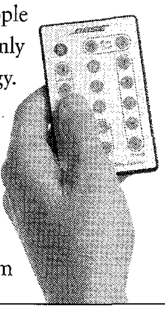

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guitar, an instrument he has played alongside such artists as Benny Goodman and Stephane Grappelli. As a guest with John's trio (which also includes another son, Martin, on bass) Pizzarelli *père* will display his guitar artistry. Father, sons, and trio pianist Ray Kennedy all love the great Tin Pan Alley repertoire, and even without a drummer in sight this foursome will have no problem swinging the paint off the walls of this new club.

Firebird Café, 365 W. 46th St. (586-0244)—Jan. 21: **BILLY STRITCH.** The son of the Broadway diva Elaine Stritch came to notice in the early eighties as the bottom third of the vocal trio Montgomery, Plant, and Stritch. The group broke up in 1990, but Stritch persevered as an unusually adroit singing pianist and an arranger (most spectacularly for Liza Minnelli).

Iridium, 48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Jan. 23: The **JEFF (TAIN) WATTS** sextet. Probably the most respected and in-demand mainstream jazz drummer, Watts has powered the bands of two Marsalis brothers, Wynton and Branford, although his allegiance remains with the latter. Watts's live band features saxophonist **RAVI COLTRANE.** Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **LES PAUL.**

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Jan. 19: Singer **NORA YORK'S** clever conflations of iconic pop, jazz, gospel, and what-have-you are ingenious, but her affecting originals are what truly expose the quirky strength of this extravagant talent. Jan. 20-23: **MARIO PAVONE'S NU TRIO.** As one of the components of the late Thomas Chapin's popular trio, bassist Pavone is an old hand at tight-knit improvisation. His own band features the rousing drummer **MATT WILSON** and pianist **PETER MADSEN,** but Pavone's soft spot for horns—his own recordings burst with thick horn charts—is starting to show. His special guests for this engagement include the superior reeds player **MARTY EHRLICH,** a frequent presence on Pavone's albums, on Jan. 20; saxophone wizard **GEORGE GARZONE** on Jan. 21-22; and trumpeter **PAUL SMOKER** on Jan. 23.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through Jan. 23: **TERI THORNTON.** The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

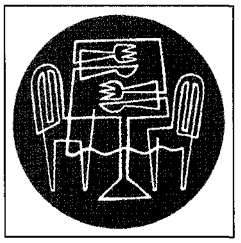
Zinc Bar, 90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—Whether blowing tank-force tenor sax with the Mingus Big Band, or making lyrical sketches on a Kip Hanrahan recording, **JOHN STUBBLEFIELD** (here Jan. 18-19) can be counted on to make music that is at once intelligent and impassioned. Saturdays and Sundays feature Brazilian jazz.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Only the Best," the title of an exhibition of eighty works from the Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon, may sound like fatuous P.R., but the show makes good on its promise. The founder of the collection, the Armenian oil magnate Calouste Sarkis Gulbenkian (1869-1955), known as Mr. Five Percent for the fee he retained for helping reorganize oil companies in the Middle East, began collecting as a child, starting with antique coins; by the time of his death he had amassed a princely trove of nearly six thousand works of art, from the ancient Egyptians to the Impressionists. Gulbenkian didn't have an adventurous eye, but he certainly had a discriminating one. The show's many highlights include examples of Ming porcelain, Turkish carpets, and rococo silver, as well as exceptional paintings by Watteau, Fragonard, Rubens, Gainsborough, Turner, and Manet. It's almost a relief to find a few pieces, such as a bland life-size statue of Apollo by Houdon, that are second-rate. Through Feb. 27. . . . ¶ From Elvis Presley's gold lamé suit, visibly worn at the knees, to the varied sartorial inspirations of Mick, Cher, Diana, and Sonny, "Rock Style" at the Costume Institute offers an adoring MTV-style walk down Golden Oldie Lane. Among the notable outfits is the magnificently weird jumpsuit of quilted vinyl worn by David Bowie for his "Ziggy Stardust" tour. Designed by Kansai Yamamoto but clearly inspired by early Frank Stella, it's a sort of theatrically hermaphroditic incarnation of sixties minimalism. Other highlights include dresses made from turquoise ostrich feathers (Cher) and razor blades (Deborah Harry), along with Madonna's ever-provocative pinnacled bodices. After so much gaudiness, the real shocker is a mannequin dressed, in retail flannel and black denim, as Bruce Springsteen. Through March 19. . . . ¶ "Sean Scully on Paper." Through March 12. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

TABLES FOR TWO



Wild Blue, One World Trade Center, 107th Fl. (524-7107) Atop Manhattan's tallest landmark, you naturally expect fireworks, harrowing views, and a crowd fresh from Liberty Island. But it's also a place where chef Michael Lomonaco runs a serious restaurant with no theme and no spectacle—in fact, barely any identity at all.

It's a scheme that works: interesting cuts of meat and fowl, boldly roasted, with very little tampering. What's listed as the Daily Game Dish, as if it were merely the soup of the day, is the heart of the menu, and from grilled elk chops to Scottish wood pigeon it's all cooked with aplomb. On the regular roster, the T-bone lamb chops with poblano Romesco sauce stand out, and Tuesday night's roast suckling pig has crisp, crackling skin and tender meat that's worth juggling your schedule for.

When Lomonaco shows off, though, he stumbles. On a recent night, the Maine lobster arrived miserably overdone, in a ruby-port-and-veal glaze suitable for meat but not for any sea creature; an appetizer called Fois Gras and Black Truffle Stuffed Pig Trotter—i.e., foot—turned out to be a creepy gelatinous mess you'd eat only on a dare. Some of the other starters are shaky, too. The Rich Shellfish Broth with Sea Scallop Ravioli seemed sadly impoverished, for example. But when the kitchen sticks to the fine-ingredients-left-alone plan, as with the yellowtail carpaccio and the wild mushroom salad, the results are impeccable.

The encyclopedic wine list provides the one note of true exuberance. Its thirty-three pages include an especially strong list of California wines to fit the food's Stateside focus. For dessert, instead of some architectonic, multiple-fudge collision, it's simplicity again: a deadpan chocolate cake made with Scharffen Berger chocolate from San Francisco. Atmosphere-wise, the California-craftsman coziness seems precious after the hundred-and-seven-story rocket ride it takes to get here. None of Wild Blue's flaws will matter, though, if you can secure one of the five window tables with a view of the vast black velvet sweep of New York Harbor, its ships and bridges and the Statue of Liberty alight. (Open Mondays through Saturdays for dinner. Entrées $21-$28.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Modern Starts" comprises three shows featuring works drawn from MOMA's permanent collection, all focussed on the years 1880-1920. "People" runs through Feb. 1; "Places" and "Things" through March 14. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—Selections from the permanent collection are on display. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—Part two of "The American Century" is a vast improvement over its predecessor, and not just because American art gathered momentum after the Second World War. The exhibition design, as a whole, is clearer: film clips and "historical" displays have been segregated to small side rooms so they don't compete directly with the nearly seven hundred art works. On the upper floors, curator Lisa Phillips succeeds in making a familiar story fresh. The Abstract Expressionist gallery is strong, and the appearance of a Chuck Close portrait in a room devoted to minimalism is smartly provocative. Only in the later rooms do the skewed priorities and omissions begin to become apparent. From this show you could learn a lot about sitcoms of the seventies, but you would never know, for example, that the decade witnessed a significant revival of representational painting. The exhibition ends with a whimper: can the nineties really have been this sterile? Through Feb. 13. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

Whitney Museum at Philip Morris, 120 Park Ave., at 42nd St. (878-2550)—Lee Boroson's "Underpass" is a bright-blue, nearly weightless public sculpture that rises from fourteen feet at its lowest point to a full height of more than forty feet and hovers above the leafy corporate atrium. At first glance, it looks stunningly goofy, like a cross between an air mattress and a freeway cloverleaf. But it's also slyly site-specific: the sloping central trajectory of the piece echoes that of the actual highway ramp (the Grand Central Station overpass) visible outside the atrium window. Striking and yet flamboyantly harmless, this Brobdingnagian crib toy proclaims Boroson the cheerful alternative to Richard Serra. Through March 17. (Open weekdays, 11 to 6, and Thursday evenings until 7:30.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—*National Geographic* meets the East Village in "Body Art: Marks of Identity," which features Pre-Colombian nose ornaments from Peru next to contemporary photographs of the pierced and tattooed natives of New York and San Francisco. Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Eastman Johnson: Painting America" is a fascinating retrospective exhibition, the first in more than twenty-five years, of Winslow Homer's greatest rival. Through Feb. 6. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. (989-5566)—The open-topped glass house that Dan Graham has raised on the roof here is eye-catching to begin with, but it's particularly beautiful when seen from the confines of a small carriage that Rodney Graham (no relation) has installed about thirty paces away. Closing the coach's door creates a dark and intimate camera-obscura effect, so that the image of the transparent sculpture and the West Chelsea skyline beyond appears on the coach's back wall—at least until some other visitor stumbles into the screening room. As a gallery worker remarked, it's a great place for a first date. Additional work by Rodney Graham (with Vera Lutter) is displayed in the lower galleries through June. . . . ¶ For the next six months, the museum's handsome, barnlike annex will showcase a piece from 1976 by the late, pioneering minimalist Donald Judd. Judd adamantly banished allusion and metaphor from his art, preferring that the form and materials stand on their own merits. These fifteen variations on a plywood box—each five feet square and three feet high—combine rigor with sensuousness to an effect that is almost sacramental. Through June 18. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

Museum of American Folk Art, Columbus Ave. at 65th St. (977-7170)—"Millennial Dreams," a delightful sampling of visionary art works, ranges from the Quaker Edward Hicks's sweetly docile "Peaceable Kingdom" to the prophetic charts of the itinerant preacher William A. Blayney, who was almost as concerned about copyright infringement as he was about the Antichrist. With paintings and sculptures by Mormons, Shakers, Millerites and others, the show is as diverse theologically as it is aesthetically. Among the most poignant artifacts is a depiction of the "New Jerusalem," by Moses Weaver, a member of a celibate community founded on the teachings of Cyrus R. Teed (1839-1908). Weaver imagined the cult's headquarters as a grand linked ring of gardens and palaces. Today, however, his projected citadel looks suspiciously like a gated community. Through May 14. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11:30 to 7:30.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Milton Avery (1885-1965)—"Edge of Abstraction" focusses on the painter's late, beautifully spare landscapes of the fifties and sixties. Light rippling across water, shadows stretching across level sand, the wriggling shapes of dunes: from these simple motifs Avery made calm, lyrical emblems, at once tender and elemental. For art historians, the question is: Are these images the natural outgrowth of Avery's own aesthetic or are they responses to younger painters like Rothko, on whom (to complicate matters) Avery was a decisive influence? Through Jan. 29. (Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. 794-0550.)

Andrew Lenaghan—Exceptionally fine plein-air landscapes, mostly painted in dilapidated areas of Brooklyn and New Jersey. The dozen views include sunken piers in Williamsburg, deserted streets in Red Hook, a pair of weedy fields in Carroll Gardens, and a boarded-up hotel in Asbury Park. Lenaghan is hardly the first person to record sites like these, but he does so with a dispassionate virtuosity that sidesteps nostalgia. As distances go milky, he resists the temptation to summarize, stitching together fine threads of paint with the fierce steadiness of a surgeon. At his best, he's the Canaletto of the outer boroughs. Through Feb. 5. (Adams, 41 W. 57th St. 644-5665.)

Damian Loeb—Has this brash young neo-photorealist grown up at all since his widely panned dêbut show last year? Well, yes. Loeb has cut back on the newsreel-style bloodstains and explosions and gone for even more sinister stuff. Strung together, Loeb's five new canvases suggest a Technicolor film noir: the protagonist, a nubile Asian high-school student, goes on a road trip, visits some forlorn motels, makes a frantic phone call, then winds up as roadkill. Not exactly a thought-provoking narrative, but the sheer slickness of Loeb's rendering skills has a certain low-brow glamour. Through Feb. 12. (Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929.)

Short List—**carmen calvo,** Galeria Ramis Barquet, 41 E. 57th St. 644-9090. Through Feb. 19. . . . **james coleman,** Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 977-7160. Through Feb. 19. . . .

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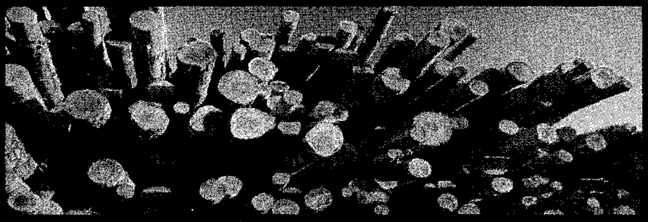

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GALLERIES—CHELSEA

DAN FLAVIN—Four pink-and-yellow sculptures by the late minimalist who gave fluorescent lighting a good name. Despite the innate austerity of the work, its palette—determined strictly by commercial availability—bathes the gallery in a rosy glow that somehow brings to mind the fact that Flavin studied briefly with Abstract Expressionist Hans Hoffman. Forget the Caribbean getaway, no tropical sunset could top this. Through Jan. 29. (Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

TIM GARDNER—Watercolors so deft you might mistake them for the snapshots on which they're based. The subject is male youth culture: less debauched than Larry Clark's kids, less clean-cut than those from "Dawson's Creek." To an eye accustomed to the pierced, tattooed, transgendered subcultures of New York, the bare-chested, beer-clutching boys here look downright exotic. Gardner's work occasionally verges on the sentimental, and the oil paintings in the back lack the immediacy of the watercolors. Still, this is one of the most interesting débuts in a while. Through Feb. 12. (303 Gallery, 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)

CHRISTIAN MARCLAY—Fresh from last summer's Venice Biennale comes a playful video collage of a phone conversation, cobbled together from countless film clips. A succession of actors from Barbara Stanwyck and Katharine Hepburn to Whoopi Goldberg and Meg Ryan gaze at, answer, talk to, and finally slam down phone after phone. Marclay has long been an artist-slash-d.j. and here he trades up to v.j. with witty, if lightweight, results. Through Jan. 29. (Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

JOHN MILLER—Miller channels the mindless spectacle of game shows in this garish musing on intellectual and spiritual bankruptcy. In one gallery, computer-generated paintings of props from "The Price Is Right" are accompanied by a haphazard arrangement of pedestals of varying sizes covered in red carpet. The intended interpretation may be Stonehenge for couch potatoes, but it falls flat. More successful are the rotating spheres of plastic flowers, floating in space. Through Jan. 22. (Metro Pictures, 519 W. 24th St. 206-7100.)

"COUPLES"—Taking its title from the 1968 Updike novel, this convivial group show features images of twosomes, mostly heterosexual, in various states of disaffection, equanimity, and ardor. Readers who skipped straight to the novel's dog-eared pages will want to plant themselves in front of erotic photographs by Nan Goldin and Larry Clark. But the show's high points are its less prurient images. These include evocative double portraits by Diane Arbus and John Currin, both of whom share Updike's mixture of virtuosity and malice. Best of all is a single canvas by Alice Neel, showing a blond waif perched by the side of her slovenly, bright-eyed boyfriend. If any image can distill all the stringy-haired glamourlessness of the seventies, this is it. Through March 4. (Cheim and Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727.)

"HEX ENDUCTION HOUR BY THE FALL"—A raucous group show based on a 1982 album by the iconoclastic British band the Fall. "There is no culture is my brag," claims the record's first lyric; curator Bob Nickas fills this basement rec room of a gallery with art that sings along. Cady Noland's in-your-face plastic-and-wood sculptures threaten to block the entrance to the back gallery, as much obstruction as art. Other standouts include Wayne Gonzales's creepy, lime-green mug shot of Jack Ruby, and Jutta Koether's angrily explosive painting "Well, Show Me Nothing." Through Feb. 12. (Team, 527 W. 26th St., 279-9219.)

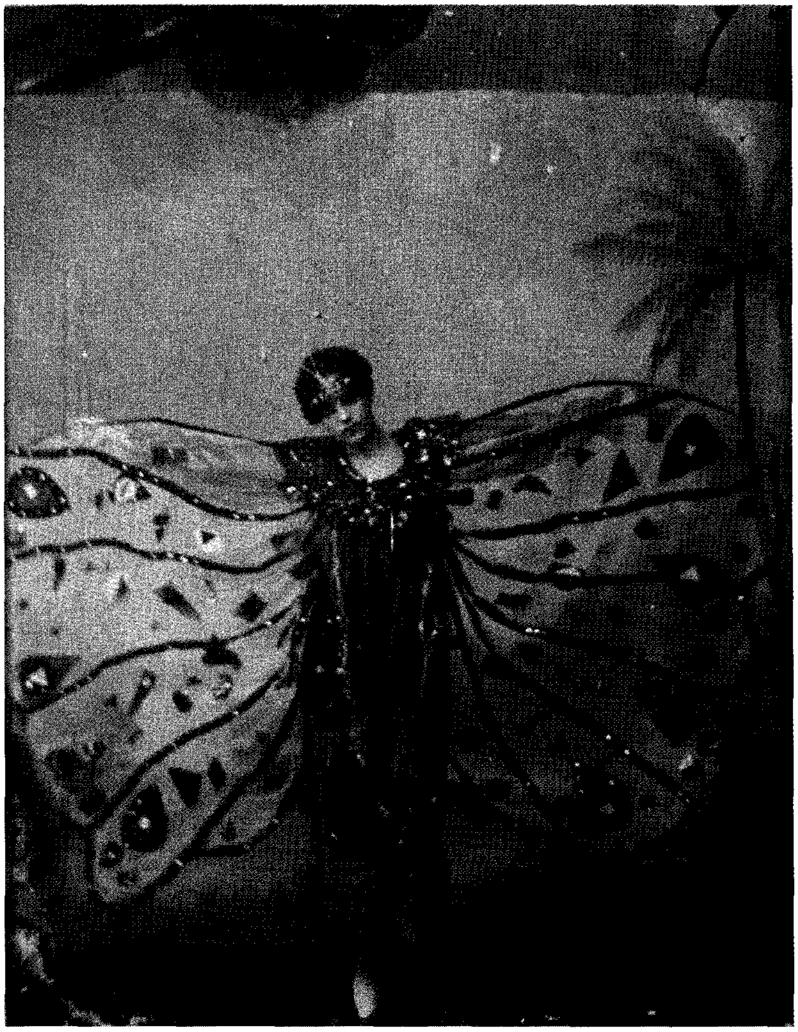
"SCIENCE FICTIONS"—Our vision of outer space is equal parts "Star Trek" and the Science Times section, or so this engaging show would have it. Some of the works, such as Claire Jervert's photographs of "flying saucers" and Christopher Johnson's deadpan landscapes with U.F.O.s, conjure up searches for new civilizations. Fact and fiction are best blurred by Yorgo Alexopoulos, who uses astronomical software to create Cibachrome photographs of the solar system, including the hotly disputed "tenth planet," Niburu. Through Feb. 6. (White Columns, 320 W. 13 St., entrance on Horatio St. 924-4212.)

SHORT LIST—**LORDAN BUNCH,** De Chiara Stewart, 521 W. 26th St. 967-6007. Through Feb. 5. . . . **LEO DE GOEDE,** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 563-4474. Through Feb. 5. . . . **PETER EDLUND** and **PATERSON EWEN,** Shainman, 513 W. 20th St. 645-1701. Both shows through Feb. 5. . . . **PERRY HOBERMAN,** Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 727-3323. Through Feb. 19. . . . **MARY JONES,** Coploff, 741-1149. Through Feb. 19. . . . **GAYIL NALLS,** Martz, 529 W. 20th St. 206-3686. Through Feb. 5. . . . **PETER RUDOLPH,** Eller, 529 W. 20th St. 206-6411. Through Feb. 5. . . . **ALLEN RUPPERSBERG,** Burgin, 243 W. 18th St. 462-2668. Through Feb. 5. . . . **JEFFREY STURGES,** Art Resources Transfer, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 691-5956. Through Feb. 5. . . . **BETTY WOODMAN,** Protetch, 511 W. 22nd St. 633-6999. Through Feb. 12. . . . **CARRIE YAMAOKA,** Debs, 525 W. 26th St. 643-2070. Through Feb. 13.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

CHRIS FINLEY—In successive shows over the past several years, Finley has presented his work as if it were stages in a video game, progressing from Levels One through Four and recently into Warp Zones. In this outing ("Warp Zone, Section Two"), the artist's scenes of chaos have a high-gloss, multiperspectival style reminiscent of recent retro animation: a few pieces look remarkably like "Ren and Stimpy" psychedelia. Is it the gobs of carefully delineated, bright-pastel drool? Through Feb. 5. (Tilton, 49 Greene St. 941-1775.)

MARINA ROSENFELD—The artist, late of the Sheer Frost Orchestra, which she organized so she could play slide guitar with nail-polish bottles, has accompanied a fragment of her latest "fragment opera" with a collection of works in several mediums. There are lightly sketched cosmological maps; lenticular still-life photographs; and a video that looks uncannily like the lyrical plastic-bag-in-the-wind video that serves as the philosophical cornerstone of the recent film "American Beauty"—although Rosenfeld's blurry, jumpy subject turns out to be a feather on a string. The balance of the work is similarly techno-naturalistic, presenting photographs of butterflies and flowers, as well as musical compositions that sound like electronic crickets, the LP versions of which lie on the gallery floor for any visitor to put in rotation. Through Jan. 22. (Marcus, 578 Broadway. 226-3200.)



"Ladino Woman in Butterfly Costume," by José Domingo Noriega, from the "Picturing Guatemala" exhibition, at the Americas Society.

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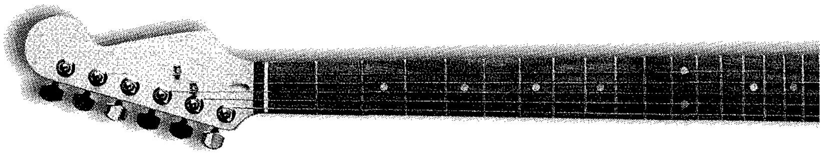

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Adriana Varejão—This show's invitation shows a large color print of the artist standing in skimpy, improvised underwear on a rock in the ocean, swinging glass bottles on strings. On closer inspection, her pedestal appears to be covered with meat, and the bottles to be filled with oil and vinegar. There's nothing so shocking at the gallery, where raw meat intrudes only in effigy, spilling highly glazed guts from blue-and-white china. Compared to such strong ceramic pieces, the balance of the show—broken plates and seascapes on canvas—is anticlimactic. Through Feb. 12. (Lehmann Maupin, 39 Greene St. 965-0753.)

"Shoes, Shoes, Shoes"—For the fetishist only. This assembly of footwear-focused photographs, drawings, and objects includes the inevitable Warhols and Mapplethorpes, followed by too many dubious cameo appearances with little attention to merit: Yoko Ono (a pair of bloody pumps), de Kooning (a ballpoint-pen drawing of a wooden clog), and Gordon Parks (a huddle of schoolgirls in saddle shoes). Both David Hockney and Maira Kalman, whose pieces hang near one another, observe the human ankle and foot from the perspective of those who know them most intimately: small dogs. Through Jan. 22. (Taylor/TZ'art, 470 Broome St. 966-9059.)

Short List—**CECILY BROWN,** Gagosian, 136 Wooster St. 228-2828. Through Feb. 19. . . . **JASON DODGE,** Kaplan, 48 Greene St. 226-6131. Through Feb. 11. . . . **KEITH EDMIER,** Petzel, 26 Wooster St. 334-9466. Through Feb. 12. . . . **JEANNETTE LOUIE,** Esso, 191 Chrystie St. 714-8192. Through Feb. 5. . . . **LEROY PERSON,** Ross, 568 Broadway. 343-2161. Through Feb. 19. . . . **LEZLY SAAR** and **PETER HRISTOFF,** Beitzel, 102 Prince St. 219-2863. Both shows through Feb. 5. . . . **JENNY SCOBEL,** Locus, 594 Broadway. 334-6424. Through Feb. 12. . . . **IONEL TALPAZAN** and **EDWARD NAGRODZKI,** American Primitive, 594 Broadway. 966-1530. Both shows through Feb. 12.

AUCTIONS

Sotheby's—Jan. 21: Americana Week begins with a sale of folk art, the centerpiece of which is a needlework sampler embroidered in Philadelphia in 1727. . . . ¶ Jan. 22: Important American furniture, including many pieces from early generations of the Beekman family, which prospered in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New York society. . . . ¶ Jan. 22-23: Some seven hundred items from a collection of waterfowl decoys and related hunting items, built up over the course of four decades by the late James M. McCleery. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Christie's—Jan. 21: American decorative art works. . . . ¶ Jan. 25-26: British furniture, ceramics, paintings, and other decorative pieces. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.) . . . ¶ At **Christie's East**—American paintings and decorative art. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0430. Jan. 19 at 1.)

Phillips—A wide-ranging auction of furniture, decorations, silver, and Oriental carpets, including a Victorian bedroom suite by the Herter Brothers which was used in a scene from Hitchcock's "Psycho." (406 E. 79th St. 570-4830. Jan. 25.)

New York Ceramics Fair—A multi-dealer gathering devoted exclusively to decorative works in ceramics, porcelain, and glass. Fifty international dealers show their wares at this potentially important addition to New York's antique scene. (National Academy of Design, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. Jan. 19-23. . . . **NOTE:** Eleven lectures by leading authorities are scheduled; for information about the show, and for lecture reservations, call 289-0496.)

Winter Antiques Show—The forty-sixth installment of this annual high-end classic. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Jan. 21-30, with a benefit opening on Jan. 20. For information, call 718-292-7392.)

"Antiques at the Other Armory"—A hundred dealers present a broad array of European, Asian, and American works. (69th Regiment Armory, Lexington Ave. at 26th St. Jan. 21-23. For information, call 255-0020.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Frantisek Vobecky (1902-91)—Surrealist-influenced photomontages from the thirties, by this Czech avant-gardist. Through Feb. 26. (Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444.)

"Earth from Above"—A delightful series of large color photographs by the French aerial photographer Yann Arthus-Bertrand, taken while flying over more than sixty countries. Through Jan. 29. (Science, Industry, and Business Library, New York Public Library, Madison Ave. at 34th St. 869-8089.)

"Picturing Guatemala"—More than a century's worth of images from the archives of CIRMA (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica), including cartes de visite, funerary portraits, plantation promotions, photographs taken by nineteenth-century ethnographers, and the photographic record of an execution during the Estrada Cabrera regime. Through April 16. (Americas Society, Park Avenue at 68th St. 249-8950.)

"YNOT"—Photographs from the latest issue of *Blind Spot*, including works by William Wegman, John Baldessari, Shannon Taggart, Scott Irvine, and James Whitlow Delano. Through Jan. 29. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600.)

Group Show—Works by, among others, Richard Billingham, Charles Hagen, Rudy Burckhardt, Laura Aguillar, and Petah Coyne. Through Jan. 22. (Lennon, Weinberg, 560 Broadway. 941-0012.)

International Center of Photography—"Propaganda and Dreams: Photographing the 1930s in the USSR and the US." Through Feb. 13. (1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

Short List—**SARAH CHARLESWORTH,** Gorney, Bravin, and Lee, 534 W. 26th St. 352-8372. Through Feb. 5. . . . **ROLAND FISCHER,** Von Lintel & Nusser, 555 W. 25th St. 242-0599. Through Jan. 29. . . . **EDWARD GRAZDA,** Sepia, 148 W. 24th St. 645-9444. Through Jan. 29. . . . **RUTH ORKIN,** Greenberg, 120 Wooster St. 334-0010. Through Jan. 22. . . . **RENÉ-JACQUES,** Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through Jan. 22. . . . **ANDREA ROBBINS AND MAX BECHER,** Tonkonow, 601 W. 26th St. 255-8450. Through Jan. 29. . . . **DENNIS STOCK,** Staley-Wise, 560 Broadway. 966-6223. Through Jan. 22. . . . **MANABU YAMANAKA,** Stux, 529 W. 20th St. 352-1600. Through Jan. 22.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera—A double bill of **CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA,** with Dolora Zajick, Fabio Armiliato, and Kim Josephson, and **PAGLIACCI,** with Veronica Villarroel, Dennis O'Neill, Juan Pons, and Dwayne Croft; conducted by Carlo Rizzi. (Jan. 19 at 8 and Jan. 22 at 1:30.) . . . **DER ROSENKAVALIER,** with Renée Fleming, Susan Graham, Heidi Grant Murphy, Stuart Neill, Hans-Joachim Ketelsen, and Franz Hawlata; James Levine. (Jan. 20 and Jan. 24 at 7:30.) . . . **LA TRAVIATA,** with Cristina Gallardo-Domas, Roberto Aronica, and Vladimir Chernov; Roberto Abbado. (Jan. 21 and Jan. 25 at 8.) . . . **MADAMA BUTTERFLY,** with Sylvie Valayre, Jane Bunnell, Vladimir Galouzine, and Thomas Allen; Marcello Viotti. (Jan. 22 at 8.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

"A Midsummer Night's Dream"—Britten's 1960 opera, in a semi-staged version featuring advanced students of the Juilliard School. (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. Jan. 20 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

"Idomeneo"—Mozart's 1781 opera, in a concert version, with the National Chorale, the National Chorale Orchestra, and various soloists, conducted by Martin Josman. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. Jan. 22 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

Boston Philharmonic—Benjamin Zander leads his orchestra in Mahler's Symphony No. 8 (the "Symphony of a Thousand"), with a passel of soloists and four choirs from Massachusetts and Connecticut. (Carnegie Hall. 278-7800. Jan. 19 at 8.)

Jupiter Symphony—At Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, Jens Nygaard conducting. Jan. 20 at 2 and 7: An all-Mozart concert that includes the C-Minor Serenade (K. 388) and the C-Minor Piano Concerto (with William Wolfram as soloist). . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 2 and 7 and Jan. 25 at 8: Two minuets by Puccini, Alexander Tcherepnin's "Suite Géorgienne" (with pianist Elena Baksht), Charles Wakefield Cadman's "To a Vanishing Race" (a symphonic poem written in 1925, as a tribute to the Native American peoples), Bruch's "Celtic Melodies" (featuring cellist Alexandra Mackenzie), and Schubert's Symphony No. 6. (152 W. 66th St. For information about tickets, call 799-1259.)

Sylvan Winds—The group performs a French-accented program: the D-Minor Wind Quintet by Antonín Reicha (actually a Bohemian by birth who became a major force at the Paris Conservatoire in the nineteenth century), D'Indy's "Chansons et Danses," Paul Taffanel's G-Minor Wind Quintet, and Gounod's "Petite Symphonie." (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. Jan. 20 at 8:15. For information about tickets, call 904-1422, ext. 13.)

New York Pops—Skitch Henderson leads a program with a Hawaiian theme, featuring the Brothers Cazimero—two singing guitarists, Robert and Roland, who have been stars of the Hawaiian-music scene for more than two decades. (Carnegie Hall. 278-7800. Jan. 21 at 8.)

Russian National Orchestra—At Avery Fisher Hall, Mikhail Pletnev conducts two all-Russian programs. Jan. 21 at 8: Tchaikovsky's symphonic ballad "The Voyevoda" and his Piano Concerto No. 2 (with Boris Berezovsky), as well as Scriabin's "Rêverie" and his "Poem of Ecstasy." . . . ¶ Jan. 23 at 3: Rachmaninoff's "Isle of the Dead" (a symphonic poem inspired by Arnold Böcklin's tenebrous painting), Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 2 (featuring Kyung Wha Chung), and Scriabin's Symphony No. 3 ("The Divine Poem"). (875-5030.)

New York Collegium—The French harpsichordist and conductor Christophe Rousset leads the period-instrument orchestra and chorus in two examples, both from the seventeen-fifties, of the French Baroque opéra-ballet, Rameau's "Anacréon" (an episode from a revival of "Les Surprises d'Amour") and Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville's "Amour et Psyché" (from "Les Fêtes de Paphos"). The vocal soloists are sopranos Karina Gauvin, Susanne Peck, and Isabelle Poulenard, countertenor Marc Molomot, and baritone Jerôme Corrêas. (Lefrak Auditorium, Queens College. Jan. 21 at 8. For information about tickets, call 212-717-9246. . . . ¶ Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Jan. 24 at 8.)

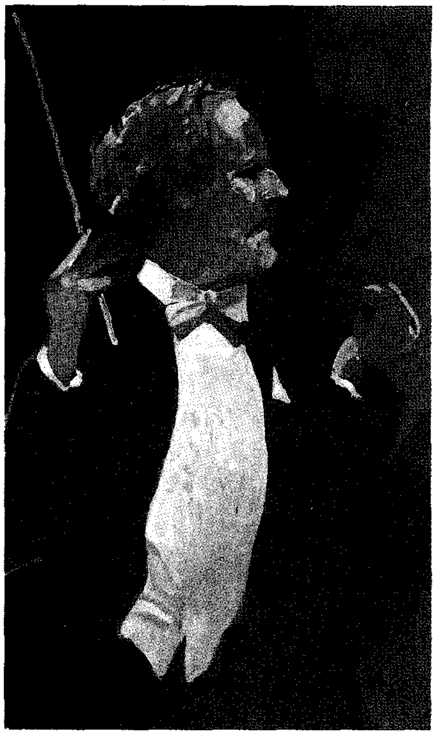
Cosmopolitan Symphony Orchestra—Gerhard Samuel conducts the première of his own composition "Where To?," plus symphonies by Mozart (his Thirty-third) and Haydn (his Eighty-fifth) and arias by Mozart (the concert aria "Mentre ti lascio," with bass-baritone Abel Motsoadi) and Delibes (the "Bell Song" from "Lakmé," featuring soprano Harolyn Blackwell). (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Jan. 23 at 2.)

Philadelphia Orchestra—Simon Rattle conducts Schoenberg's "Gurrelieder," with the Philadelphia Singers Chorale and soloists Andrea Gruber (soprano), Birgit Remmert (mezzo-soprano), Thomas Moser and Herbert Lippert (tenors), Gary Relyea (bass-baritone), and Franz Masura (speaker). (Carnegie Hall. 278-7800. Jan. 24 at 8.)

National Symphony Orchestra—Leonard Slatkin leads Joan Tower's "Tambor," Richard Danielpour's "Voices of Remembrance" for String Quartet and Orchestra (featuring the Guarneri Quartet), and Berlioz's "Symphonie Fantastique." (Carnegie Hall. 278-7800. Jan. 25 at 8.)

RECITALS

Juilliard String Quartet—The foursome plays quartets by Haydn (in C Major, Op. 76, No. 3, the "Emperor"), Bartók (his Second), and Beethoven (in E Minor, Op. 59, No. 2). (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Jan. 19 at 8.)



Benjamin Zander, conducting the Boston Philharmonic, at Carnegie Hall.

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

Michael Brown—Tenor, in a forty-minute program of Schubert lieder, assisted by fortepianist Gwendolyn Toth. (St. Francis of Assisi Church, 135 W. 31st St. Jan. 20 at 1:15. No tickets necessary.)

Bargemusic—Jan. 20 at 7:30 and Jan. 23 at 4: Presenting Jean Françaix's Piano Trio, Ravel's Duo for Violin and Cello, and Franck's Piano Quintet. . . . ¶ Jan. 21-22 at 7:30: Beethoven's "Variations on a Theme from Mozart's 'Die Zauberflöte' " (for cello and piano), Schoenberg's String Trio, and Shostakovich's Piano Quintet. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

Anthony Newman—The fleet-fingered organist's program includes Bach's E-Minor Prelude and Fugue (BWV 548) and C-Minor Passacaglia and Fugue (BWV 582), in addition to several of his own compositions. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. Jan. 20 at 8.)

"60 Seconds for Piano"—Guy Livingston performs solo-piano compositions by sixty composers, not one of which lasts more than a minute. Louis Andriessen, Derek Bermel, William Bolcom, Pierre Boulez, and Elliott Sharp are among the more recognizable names in the lineup. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Jan. 21 at 8.)

Focus! 2000—This year, the Juilliard School's annual exploration of modern music turns its spotlight on works completed during the the last three years of the recent century. Jan. 21 at 8: Joel Sachs leads the New Juilliard Ensemble in the premières of works by Valentin Bibek, Steve Reich, Olav Anton Thommessen, and Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky, as well as Toshio Hosokawa's "Seascapes—Daybreak." . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 8: Chamber music by Rolf Wallin, Salvatore Sciarrino, Yves Prin, Jukka Tiensuu, John Woolrich, and Jon Deak. . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 8: More chamber works, by Cecilie Orr, Reinhard Febel, Giya Kancheli, Oliver Knussen, Karl Aage Rasmussen, and Peter Sculthorpe. (Juilliard Theatre, 155 W. 65th St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406. The festival continues through Jan. 28.)

Radu Lupu—The eminent pianist performs Janáček's Sonata "1.x.1905," Chopin's Fantaisie (Op. 49), Schubert's "Moments Musicaux" (D. 780), and Brahms's Sonata No. 3. (Carnegie Hall. 278-7800. Jan. 22 at 7:30.)

Elmar Oliveira—The violinist plays sonatas by Leclair, Ildebrando Pizzetti, and Copland, among other works, with pianist Robert Koenig assisting. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Jan. 22 at 8.)

Lara St. John—The Canadian violinist is assisted by pianist Ilan Rechtman in Wieniawski's Violin Concerto No. 2; cellist Amir Eldan joins them for Beethoven's Piano Trio in E-Flat Major (Op. 70, No. 2). (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. Jan. 23 at noon.)

Scott St. John—The violinist and violist (and elder brother of Lara) is assisted by pianist Reiko Aizawa in Takemitsu's "Raintree No. 2" and "Hika," Messiaen's Variations, and two sonatas by Brahms (the G-Major Violin Sonata and F-Minor Viola Sonata). (New School Auditorium, 66 W. 12th St. 243-9937. Jan. 23 at 2.)

Robert ♥ Clara—No married couple in the history of classical music enjoyed a relationship that was at once as hard won, as musically rewarding, and as heartrending as that of the Schumanns. Clara Wieck was already a star pianist in the making when, in 1830, Robert moved into her home to study piano with her domineering father. After a few years, they fell in love but only managed to marry in 1840, after a lawsuit overruled her father's objections. Their devotion was intense—it left a legacy of passionate compositions and acclaimed performances by both, not to mention seven children—but their happiness proved short-lived; by 1850, six years before his death, Schumann was slipping into insanity. In this bio-concert, the Broyhill Chamber Players, with several colleagues, offer performances of numerous pieces by both of the Schumanns (including his Piano Quartet and her Romances for Violin and Piano), as well as readings from their correspondence and from the so-called "marriage diaries" they kept religiously during the early years of their marriage. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Jan. 23 at 3.)

Met Chamber Ensemble—Musicians of the Met Orchestra perform a program that includes Varèse's "Octandre," Stravinsky's Octet for Wind Instruments, and Milhaud's "La Création du Monde," as well as works by Debussy, Satie, Boulez, and Ravel. Soprano Lisa Saffer and mezzo-soprano Jossie Perez are among the soloists, and James Levine conducts. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. 278-7800. Jan. 23 at 5.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—This month, the Society is exploring the flux of musical styles that marked the period 1917-1945, as evinced by a wide variety of European and American music. Nine players team up for this installment, which combines the well known (Shostakovich's Piano Quintet) with lesser-known works that were composed in Paris between the wars: Alexandre Tansman's Septet for Winds and Strings, Varèse's "Density 21.5" for solo flute (its title refers to the density of the element platinum, from which the instrument of the dedicatee, Georges Barrère, was constructed), Poulenc's Cello Sonata (a bit out of the chronology, since it dates from 1948), and a suite from Martinů's charming ballet "La Revue de Cuisine." (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Jan. 23 at 5.)

Sergio Tiempo—In his New York début recital, the Argentine pianist performs sonatas by Scarlatti and Chopin (in B Minor), Ravel's "Gaspard de la Nuit," and pieces by Liszt. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. Jan. 23 at 5.)

Justin Bischof—The organist's all-Bach recital includes the Partita on "Christ, der du bist der helle Tag" and the Concerto in A Minor (BWV 593). (Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Central Park West at 65th St. Jan. 23 at 5. No tickets necessary.)

ALSO OF INTEREST

ARIANA DUO: Music for flute and harp. (Trinity Church, Broadway at Wall St. Jan. 20 at 1. Admission by contribution.) . . . **YUNG WOOK YOO:** The winner of the 1998 Santander International Piano Competition, in his New York début recital. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. Jan. 20 at 8.) . . . **DUSAN BOGDANOVIC:** The guitarist is joined by several colleagues in a recital that comprises several of his own works, in addition to pieces by John Dowland, Frank Martin, and Maurice Ohana. (Hubbard Recital Hall, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802, ext. 428. Jan. 20 at 8.) . . . **JANINE JANSEN:** Violinist, in her New York début recital, playing sonatas by Beethoven, Schnittke, Debussy, and Ravel, as well as Saint-Saëns's "Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso"; with pianist Folke Nauta. (Weill Recital Hall. 278-7800. Jan. 21 at 8.) . . . **MANHATTAN CHAMBER SINFONIA:** Works by Mozart, Wuorinen, Sibelius, and Mendelssohn (his Symphony No. 3). (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. Jan. 21 at 8. No tickets necessary.) . . . **GREGG SMITH SINGERS:** Works by Billings, Copland, and others. (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. Jan. 22 at 8. For information about tickets, call 914-376-8899.) . . . **HAI-KYUNG SUH:** Performing piano works by Schumann, Isang Yun, and Stravinsky. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Jan. 22 at 8.) . . . **WINSLOW BROWNING:** The guitarist plays works by Bach, Albéniz, and others. (St. Luke In-the-Fields, 487 Hudson St., at Grove St. Jan. 23 at 4. Tickets at the door.) . . . **ELIZABETH SCHULZE:** Violist, with pianist Luba Slepoi, in a program that includes sonatas by Glinka and Shostakovich. (St. Paul's Chapel, Broadway at Fulton St. Jan. 24 at noon. Admission by contribution.) . . . **WINDSCAPE:** A woodwind quintet, playing works by John Harbison and Kenji Bunch, among others. (Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. Jan. 24 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

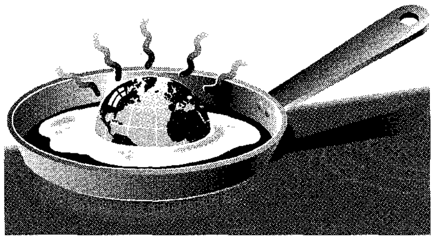
ABOVE AND BEYOND

Readings—Jan. 23 at 2: By E. Ethelbert Miller, director of the African American Resource Center at Howard University, from the poetry of Langston Hughes. (Wave Hill, 249th St. at Independence Ave., the Bronx. 718-549-3200.) . . . ¶ Jan. 23 at 7:30: By Colin Harrison, from his novel "Afterburn," and Tom Paine, from his collection, "Scar Vegas and Other Stories." (Temple Bar, 332 Lafayette St. 925-4242.) . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 8: By novelist V. S. Naipaul, from his work. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.) . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 7: By poet Gerald Stern. (Stella Adler Conservatory, 419 Lafayette St. For reservations, which are required, call 260-0525.)

Talks—Jan. 20 at 6: David Allen, director of education at the National Maritime Historical Society, separates legend and lore from the truth about the seventeenth-century pirate Captain Kidd. (Fraunces Tavern Museum, 54 Pearl St. 425-1778.) . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 5:30: Shakespeare scholar Paul Streitz discusses the elusive identity of the Bard. (New York Public Library, Mid-Manhattan Branch, Fifth Ave. at 40th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Jan. 24 at 8: Photographer Jerrold P. Fuchs, who has visited Iceland, the Himalayas, and Alaska, talks about the historic connection between photography and travel. (Explorers Club, 46 E. 70th St. 628-8383.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Turning Up the Heat



NIGEL HOLMES

THE recent run of balmy Decembers and titanic hurricanes has made the weather front-page news. Various new books address the crisis, and conclude that the threat of global warming is real and only likely to get worse.

The Change in the Weather (Delacorte), by the New York *Times* science reporter William K. Stevens, gives a relatively coolheaded overview of the catastrophic atmospheric changes that have visited the planet during the last four billion years, and explains how people in the last century may have contributed to the acceleration of weather disasters by overusing fossil fuels. Human activity, Stevens writes, "may for the first time be reshaping the climate system on a global scale."

Many people don't want to believe such Cassandra-like judgments, particularly those in the trillion-dollar petrochemical industry. In **The Heat Is On** (Perseus), Ross Gelbspan, a Boston journalist, describes the 1995 collapse of an Antarctic ice shelf the size of Rhode Island. "Ice works like a mirror," he writes. "Its surface reflects most of the heat radiated by the sun back into the atmosphere." When that mirror is gone, the planet can't keep cool. Gelbspan contends that scientists have known of this risk for decades, and he argues that Americans remain complacent because "oil and coal industries have spent millions of dollars to persuade them that global warming isn't happening."

According to the historian Gale F. Christianson, however, the trend has been with us for centuries. In his informative and engaging book **Greenhouse: The 200-Year Story of Global Warming** (Walker), Christianson chronicles the key players in the warmup to the meltdown, from Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Fourier, the early discoverer of the so-called greenhouse effect, to Charles Darwin, James Watt, Andrew Carnegie, Henry Ford, Charles Keeling, and Al Gore. Industrialists might prefer to regard El Niño as a fluke, and scientists might wish it were so. But, in the end, Christianson concludes, "it is science and not personal conviction that will have the last word."

—Liesl Schillinger

Books.

[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

Get Your Life in Shape

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by Dean Edell, M.D.

Popular radio and TV personality Dr. Edell cuts through today's medical jargon, germ phobia and outrageous media reports with a logic-driven approach to staying healthy. He encourages readers to take control of their conditions with sound advice based on moderation and common sense that allows good health and good times to coexist. (HarperCollins)

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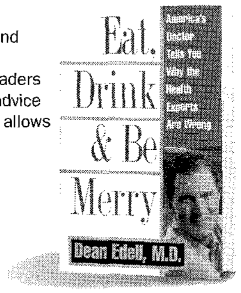
Eat, Drink & Be Merry
America's Doctor Tells You Why the Health Experts Are Wrong
Dean Edell, M.D.

BODY FOR LIFE

by Bill Phillips & Michael D'Orso

The founder and editor of *Muscle Media* magazine presents Body-for-Life, an integrated twelve-week empowerment program that begins with the body and extends to the mind. Actual testimonials to Phillips' process (weight and aerobic routines, time management, food advice and more) complete this transformational experience. (HarperCollins)

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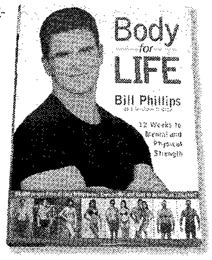
Body for LIFE
Bill Phillips
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DR. ATKINS' NEW DIET REVOLUTION

by Robert C. Atkins, M.D.

The revolution continues as Dr. Atkins updates his innovative diet plan, a plan currently experiencing an unequaled surge in popularity. The latest edition of the *New York Times* bestseller illustrates how you can lose weight by eating low-carbohydrate, protein rich foods and includes delicious recipes and all-new facts on fighting health problems. (Avon Books)

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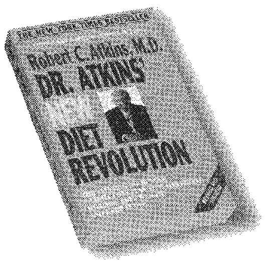
Robert C. Atkins, M.D.
DR. ATKINS' NEW DIET REVOLUTION

REALAGE

by Michael F. Roizen, M.D.

Depending on your lifestyle, your biological age can differ from your chronological age by up to twenty-six years. Once you determine your biological age, what can you do to improve it? The cutting—edge RealAge program offers scientific ways to alter negative health patterns—from poor diet to stress to smoking-and reverse the aging process. (Cliff Street Books)

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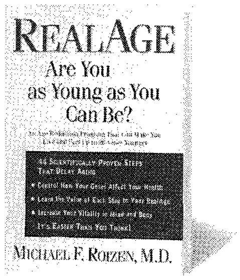
REALAGE
Are You as Young as You Can Be?
MICHAEL F. ROIZEN, M.D.

THE ZONE

by Barry Sears, Ph.D., with Bill Lawren

Despite the "low-fat revolution" of the past fifteen years, Americans are still the fattest people on earth. Based on Nobel Prize-winning research, Dr. Sears explains how to achieve permanent weight loss and gain peak physical condition—the key is to utilize simple food blocks that balance insulin levels and put you into a healthy Zone. (ReganBooks)

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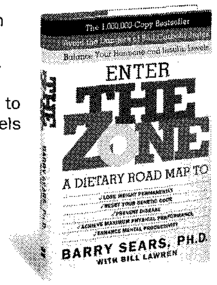
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BARRY SEARS, PH.D.
WITH BILL LAWREN

EAT MORE, WEIGH LESS

by Dean Ornish, M.D.

You don't have to eat like a bird to lose weight. Acclaimed physician/bestselling author Dr. Ornish explains how you can eat abundantly and frequently if you eat correctly. Based on groundbreaking research and containing more than 250 heart-friendly recipes, *Eat More, Weigh Less* is a healthy plan for better living. (HarperPerennial)

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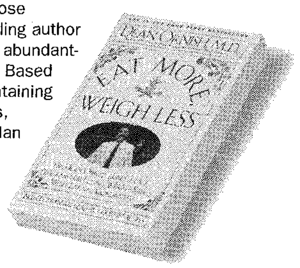
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THE MOVIES

OPENING

Down to You—Kris Isacsson directed this romantic comedy about a student (Selma Blair) who moonlights as a porn actress. With Freddie Prinze, Jr. Opening Jan. 21.

Hellhounds on My Trail—A documentary about blues musician Robert Johnson. Directed by Robert Mugge. Opening Jan. 21. (The Screening Room.)

A Map of the World—Sigourney Weaver plays a mother ostracized by her new town when a child in her care dies accidentally. Directed by Scott Elliott. Opening Jan. 21. (Angelika Film Center and Cinema II.)

Rear Window—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Jan. 21. (Film Forum.)

Wirey Spindell—A comedy about a young man who has an unusual sexual past. With Eric Schaeffer, who also wrote and directed. Opening Jan. 21.

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

Any Given Sunday—In Oliver Stone's pro-football movie, everything happens at once: the ball is snapped, thighs churn, bodies lock together, and, as the coach screams, an arm is raised to throw the ball. Stone takes us so deep inside the action that we feel we're being threshed by the teeth of a machine. The movie is ostensibly a protest against corporate control of sport but is itself a prime example of corporate art. With Al Pacino, haggard and magnificent, as the aging, traditionalist coach Tony D'Amato; Dennis Quaid as the star quarterback who, in his late thirties, is fading fast; Jamie Foxx as the young hot shot who wants to replace him, and who must be taught to play not just for himself but for the team; Cameron Diaz as the blond-bitch team owner; and football great Lawrence Taylor as a defensive genius who risks maiming himself.—*David Denby* (1/10/00) (84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Murray Hill Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 72nd Street East, and Village Theatre VII.)

L'Avventura (1959)—Antonioni's study of the human condition at the higher social and economic levels—a study of adjusted, compromising modern man, afflicted by short memory, thin remorse, the capacity for easy betrayal. The characters are active only in trying to discharge their anxiety: sex is their sole means of contact. Too shallow to be truly lonely, they are people trying to escape their boredom by reaching out to one another and finding only boredom. Because the film is subtle and ascetic, yet laborious about revealing its meanings, it suggests Henry James when he "chewed more than he bit off." Visually, it's extraordinary: a calm hangs over everything—Antonioni's space is a vacuum in which people are aimlessly moving. This is upper-class neo-realism—the poetry of moral and spiritual poverty. There had been nothing like it before, and it isn't fair to blame this movie for all the elegant sleepwalking and desolation that followed. In Italian.—*Pauline Kael* (Anthology Film Archives; Jan. 22-23.)

Opening Jan. 21, Sigourney Weaver in "A Map of the World."

MICHAEL WITTE

Cradle Will Rock—In 1937, Orson Welles and John Houseman barely succeeded in putting on Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock," a musical drama about prostitutes, unions, and a lot of other things that musicals were never meant to mention. Tim Robbins's picture tells the interlocking stories of that supercharged age. Houseman (Cary Elwes) and Welles (Angus Macfadyen) are merely part of the procession; we also get the saga of Nelson Rockefeller (John Cusack) paying Diego Rivera (Ruben Blades) to paint a giant mural and then having it destroyed. As if in homage to that lost work, Robbins moves gaily and with high technical fluency from penniless actors (John Turturro and Emily Watson) to sincere socialites like Countess La Grange (Vanessa Redgrave) and a ravishing Fascist named Margherita Sarfatti (Susan Sarandon). With Hank Azaria as Blitzstein, and—best of all—Cherry Jones as Hallie Flanagan, the smiling mainstay of the Federal Theatre in its darkest hour.—*Anthony Lane* (12/13/99) (Angelika Film Center, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square.)

Dottie Gets Spanked (1994)—Todd Haynes's rarely screened short is like a Freudian haiku: it hints at some larger psychosexual truths, yet glides coolly under them, leaving us to extract our own meanings. It centers on Stevie, a six-year-old boy who is obsessed with Dottie, the star of an "I Love Lucy"-like television show. Mother indulges his devotion, Father disapproves, and the girls on the school bus, who, unlike Stevie, can freely discuss their adoration of Dottie, think he's a freak. Haynes subtly presents the forces acculturating an effeminate boy in the stilted atmosphere of fifties Long Island. In the face of this pressure, Stevie retains his poise and dwells on fantasies of revenge. By the end, the question of who does or doesn't deserve to get spanked gains a remarkable intensity.—*Michael Agger* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Jan. 19.)

The Emperor and the Assassin—Chen Kaige's ambitious historical epic is more diorama than drama. The film re-creates the rise to power of Ying Zheng, the warlord who in 221 B.C. united China and became its first emperor. Chen wants to show us the violent, decisive acts that shape history, and the plot eventually sets Zheng (Li Xuejian) against his childhood lover, Lady Zhao (Gong Li, who retains her beauty even after her character's face is branded), and Jing Ke (Zhang Fengyi), the reluctant assassin she sends to kill him. The film is parcelled into five acts, and moves at a serene, stately pace—a constant reminder that we are watching History. The dialogue is appropriately remote and epigrammatic. The film's saving graces are its heady, intense battle sequences and the high level of anthropological detail which informs every scene. In Mandarin.—*M.A.* (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

The Great Train Robbery (1903)—A gunman fires straight at the audience in the most familiar shot from this breakthrough in visual storytelling (directed by Edwin S. Porter). But that flourish has nothing to do with the rest of the film, which in just eleven minutes and fourteen scenes sets the pattern for locomotive stickups in the movies—from the beating and binding of a telegraph operator to a climactic shootout between good guys and bad guys. This short film's pioneering images—armed men sneaking around a water tower, detaching an engine from the rest of a railroad, and eliminating anyone in their path—would reach their apotheosis sixty-six years later in "The Wild Bunch."—*Michael Sragow* (Museum of Modern Art; Jan. 20 and Jan. 23.)

The Green Mile—Frank Darabont's adaptation of Stephen King's 1996 serial novel is a three-hour-and-eight-minute religious allegory about a black convict (Michael Clarke Duncan), a white prison guard (Tom Hanks), and a mouse. The convict is meant to be Jesus Christ, and the mouse, which gets crushed and then reborn, is meant to represent survival—or perhaps Life Itself. Darabont lays out his meagre death-row story with lethal thoroughness, and the miracles arrive on schedule. By the end, the sanctimonious hypocrisy is all but unbearable.—*D.D.* (12/20/99) (Coronet Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

Holy Smoke—A mad new movie from Jane Campion, who has forsaken the incisiveness of "An Angel at My Table" and "The Piano" for something close to an acid trip. Kate Winslet plays Ruth, a young Australian woman who travels to India and falls victim to—or, from her point of view, finds peace and poise with—a religious cult. Her family lures her back to Sydney and hires an "exit counselor" to clear out her mind. Given that this counselor is supposed to be the voice of sanity in the movie, it is unfortunate that Campion assigned the role to Harvey Keitel. Winslet, by comparison, seems wholly in control—by turns lucid and lubricious, and always alive to the comedy of the situation. Thank heaven somebody is, because, long before the end, the film drifts into the outback and starts wandering around in circles. The forced weirdness of the imagery and the slightly weary satire of bourgeois existence do not make for an appetizing mix. In fact, the whole thing could use a little exit counseling.—*A.L.* (1/17/00) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Lincoln Square.)

The Hurricane—A very square inspirational movie, factually untrustworthy, about the black boxer Rubin (Hurricane) Carter, a contender for the middleweight crown, who was locked up in 1967 for murders that he did not commit, and who spent years in prison refashioning himself as a lean, ascetic thinker and militant—the icon of the African-American male unjustly incarcerated. As Carter, Denzel Washington offers his usual concentration, quickness, and stern, appraising gaze; he pulls back from obvious emphasis and lowers his voice when he's most earnest and deadly. Washington is great, but the movie is a crock, a liberal fairy tale about a black American teen-ager (Vicellous Reon Shannon) and three white Canadian do-gooders (Liev Schreiber, John Hannah, and Deborah Kara Unger) who perform the investigative work that leads to Carter's release. The movie slights the work of lawyers who worked for Carter without fees for years, and neglects to tell us that Carter had been imprisoned once for three muggings before his arrest for the murders. Directed, clunkily, by Norman Jewison; written by Armyan Bernstein and Dan Gordon.—*D.D.* (1/10/00) (Beekman, Chelsea West, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Film Forum.)

Magnolia—In Paul Thomas Anderson's new movie, the characters break down, fall apart, and denounce themselves and others. "Magnolia" consists of multiple vignettes set in the San Fernando Valley, but since there's no common theme, the picture becomes a kind of mad crackup derby. Much of the material is earnest Arthur Miller-type stuff about how we can't escape the past, we can't escape the evil we've done, we all need to be truthful with one another, and so on. The ideas are banal, but Anderson ("Boogie Nights") plays each sequence in real time and cuts among them with remarkable fluency, and the actors have some tremendous arialike moments—especially Julianne Moore as an adulterous young wife, John C. Reilly as an angelic cop looking for love, and Tom Cruise as some sort of sex guru who hosts a cable-TV show called "Seduce and Destroy." With Jason Robards, Philip Seymour Hoffman, and William H. Macy.—*D.D.* (12/20/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

Man on the Moon—Jim Carrey, as the surrealist comic Andy Kaufman, who died in 1984, captures Kaufman's infantile grandiosity, the taunting ironic schmuckiness that dared anyone to take offense. Unfortunately, the moviemakers' intention is not to illuminate Kaufman but to enshrine him as a pure performer and beautiful nut case. We are too intimidated to ask such obvious questions as, Is Kaufman calculating and shrewd or is he just unconscious—a semi-psychotic set loose in the media? Our desire to understand him is recast as some sort of existential weakness; the movie turns into an exercise in one-upmanship. With Paul Giamatti, Danny DeVito, and Courtney Love. Written by Scott Alexander and Larry Karaszewski.—*D.D.* (12/27/99-1/3/00) (Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

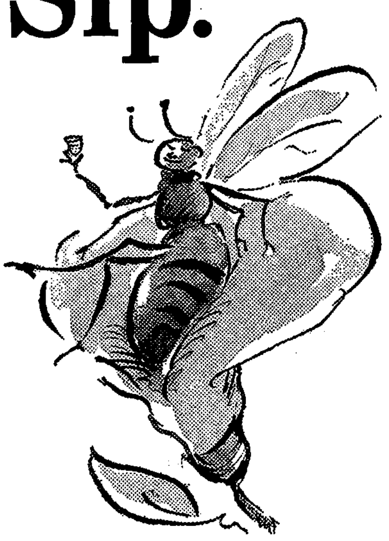
Mr. Death—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Quad Cinema.)

Snow Falling on Cedars—Set in the Pacific Northwest in 1950, Scott Hicks's movie (his first since "Shine") confronts all the big issues: love, death, memory, war, forgiveness, racial hatred, and the irresistible urge welling from the heart of primitive man—to flick an entire bagful of M&M's at a movie screen. The story turns on the demise of a local fisherman. His friend Kazuo (Rick Yune), a respected member of the local Japanese-American community, is accused of murder. Ethan Hawke stars as a young reporter covering the case. The film is so entombed in gloom and crummy weather, so rich in meaningless detail, that by the end you don't particularly care who whacked the poor victim, let alone why; on the other hand, under the weight of all that snow, you get a pretty good idea of what it feels like to be a cedar.—*A.L.* (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

The Talented Mr. Ripley—For his first outing since "The English Patient," the writer and director Anthony Minghella has returned to the roasted light of Italy. The source is Patricia Highsmith's spooky, misanthropic novel of 1955; Matt Damon plays Tom Ripley, her murderous hero, although he lacks the quicksilver elusiveness that the role demands. He is outshone by Jude Law, whose violent disappearance, halfway through the picture, is a grievous wound. Law is sunny, slippery, and pansexual; he might have made a better Ripley himself. In the female roles, Gwyneth Paltrow struggles to find anything much in the stony Marge, whom Highsmith so loftily scorned; more rewarding is the dreamy Cate Blanchett as an heiress named Meredith Logue—a part invented by Minghella. Her fine features are like a flawless period detail in themselves. The film feels warm but unsettled, as if hinting at approaching storms; the score, too, flits from lugubrious to manic. With Philip Seymour Hoffman, perfectly cast once again, this time as another of Tom's victims.—*A.L.* (12/27/99-1/3/00) (East 85th Street, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Olympia I and II, Union Square, and Village Theatre VII.)

Titus—Shakespeare's first, and most violent, tragedy, "Titus Andronicus," lacks the wit that leavens the gore of his later works. Julie Taymor, making her film directorial début, softens the edges by mixing modern and ancient scene elements, interrupting the action with surreal allegorical montages, and introducing a new character, Young Lucius (Osheen Jones), a twentieth-century boy who is meant to be a stand-in for the audience. Before Titus (Anthony Hopkins) gets around to serving his famous sons-of-the-queen-filled pie, Taymor has shown us ritual sacrifice, rape, murder, torture, and several dismemberments. It's all very beautiful, but in her desire to make "Titus" relevant, Taymor presents the play's symbolism with all the subtlety of a knife to the gut. With Jessica Lange and Alan Cumming.—*M.A.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, Cinema II, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square.)

Topsy-Turvy—Mike Leigh's brilliant re-creation of the most famous partnership in the British theatre—the collaboration of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan in the glory era of imperial rule. There are elements here of a traditional bio-pic—failure, triumph, intimations of immortality—but none of the stodginess and self-congratulation that usually plague the form. Sullivan (Allan Corduner), a libertine who nevertheless had serious pretensions as a composer, and Gilbert (Jim Broadbent), formal, irascible, and asexual, but a great theatrical pro, are so dissimilar in temperament that they can hardly bear each other's company. Leigh suggests that the combination of



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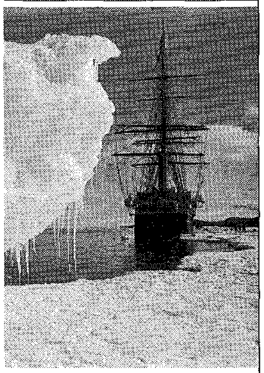

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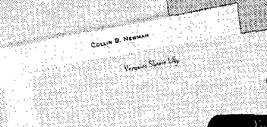

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*sentimental languor and incisiveness pro*duced the art of "The Mikado," whose preparation and first performance take up the second half of the movie. The authentic period *stage lighting produces* a *glow on the* painted faces; the fragile beauty of Sullivan's tunes is piercing when they are played, as they are here, at slower tempos than we are used to hearing. In all, *one of* the greatest movies about the theatre. With Lesley Manville, Timothy Spall, Ron Cook, and Wendy Nottingham.—*D.D.* (12/27/99-1/3/00) (Paris.)

ALSO PLAYING

ALL ABOUT MY MOTHER (11/22/99): Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **AMERICAN BEAUTY** (9/20/99): First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, The Screening Room, and State. . . . **AMERICAN MOVIE:** Film Forum. . . . **ANGELA'S ASHES:** Coronet Cinemas, Lincoln Square, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **ANNA AND THE KING** (12/27/99-1/3/00): Chelsea Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, Village East Cinemas, and Ziegfeld. . . . **AUTUMN TALE:** Quad Cinema. . . . **BEING JOHN MALKOVICH** (11/22/99): BAM Rose Cinemas, 59th Street East Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 62nd & Broadway, and Waverly. . . . **BICENTENNIAL MAN:** East 86th Street Cinemas and Kips Bay Theatre. . . . **BOYS DON'T CRY** (10/18-25/99): Criterion Center and Quad Cinema. . . . **THE CIDER HOUSE RULES** (12/13/99): Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, Kips Bay Theatre, and Lincoln Square. . . . **COOKIE'S FORTUNE:** Quad Cinema. . . . **DIAMONDS:** Art Greenwich Twin. . . . **THE END OF THE AFFAIR** (12/6/99): BAM Rose Cinemas, Lincoln Square, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **FANTASIA 2000** (1/17/00): Lincoln Square. . . . **GALAXY QUEST:** Chelsea West, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square. . . . **GIRL, INTERRUPTED:** Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, and Union Square. . . . **AN IDEAL HUSBAND:** Art Greenwich Twin. . . . **THE INSIDER** (11/8/99): Cinema 3rd Avenue and Union Square. . . . **LIBERTY HEIGHTS** (11/29/99): Orpheum VII, Sutton 1 and 2, and Waverly. . . . **THE LIMEY** (10/9/99): Cinema Village. . . . **MANSFIELD PARK** (11/29/99): Angelika Film Center and First & 62nd Cinemas. . . . **MY DOG SKIP:** Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square. . . . **NEXT FRIDAY:** Astor Plaza, Chelsea West, 84th Street Sixplex, Orpheum VII, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **ONEGIN:** Cinema Village. . . . **PRINCESS MONONOKE** (11/8/99): Cinema Village. . . . **SLEEPY HOLLOW** (11/22/99): 42nd Street E Walk and State. . . . **STUART LITTLE:** Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square. . . . **SUPERNOVA:** Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **SWEET AND LOWDOWN** (12/6/99): First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Union Square. . . . **THE THIRD MIRACLE:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema. . . . **TOY STORY 2:** East 86th Street Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village East Cinemas.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Mental Hygiene: Social Guidance Films 1945-1970." A retrospective of the short instructive films shown in school classrooms throughout the postwar era. Guest curator and historian Ken Smith introduces each collection. Jan. 22 at 2: "Drugs.". . .Jan. 22 at 4: "Civics.". . .Jan. 23 at 2: "Troublemakers.". . .Jan. 23 at 4: "Fun Films II.". . . ¶ Jan. 22-23 at 6:30: "Bringing Out the Dead" (1999, Martin Scorsese).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES, *32 Second Ave., at* 2nd St. (505-5110)—A showcase of films released by Kino International. Jan. 20 at 7: "Smiles of a Summer Night" (1955, Ingmar Bergman; in Swedish). . . . Jan. 20 at 9: "The Good Girls" (1960, Claude Chabrol; in French). . . .Jan. 21 at 7 and Jan. 22 at 9:30: "The Outcry" (1957, Michelangelo Antonioni; in Italian). . . .Jan. 22 at 2: "Who the Hell Is Juliette?" (1997, Carlos Marcovich; in Spanish). . . .Jan. 22 at 4: "Brother" (1997, Alexei Balabanov; in Russian). . . . Jan. 22 at 6:30 and Jan. 23 at 2: "L'Avventura" (†). . . .Jan. 23 at 5: "My Friend Ivan Lapshin" (1971, Alexei Gherman; in Russian). . . .Jan. 23 at 7: "Through a Glass Darkly" (1961, Bergman; in Swedish). . . . Jan. 23 at 9: "The Bicycle Thief" (1949, Vittorio De Sica; in Italian). . . .Jan. 24 at 6:30: "Dr. Akagi" (1998, Shohei Imamura; in Japanese and German). . . .Jan. 24 at 9:30: "The Match Factory Girl" (1990, Aki Kaurismäki; in Finnish).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Jan. 19 at 6 and 9: "Dottie Gets Spanked" (†) and "Poison" (1991, Todd Haynes). . . . ¶ A series of films with Harvey Keitel. Jan. 20 at 6 and 9: "La Mort en Direct" (1980, Bertrand Tavernier). . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 6 and 9: "Jonah Who

THEATRE ADDRESSES

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(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

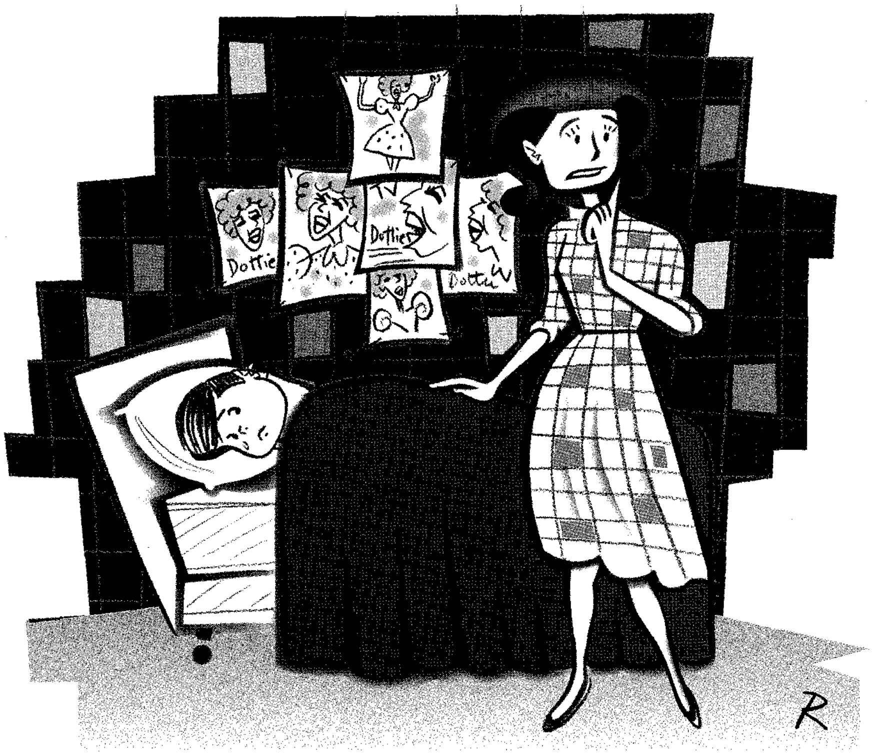
AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077).
ANGELIKA FILM CENTER, 18 W. Houston St.
ART GREENWICH TWIN, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
ASTOR PLAZA, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM ROSE CINEMAS, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
BEEKMAN, Second Ave. at 66th St.
CHELSEA CINEMAS, 260 W. 23rd St.
CHELSEA WEST, 333 W. 23rd St.
CINEMA I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA 3RD AVENUE, Third Ave. at 60th St.
CINEMA VILLAGE, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
CORONET CINEMAS, Third Ave. at 59th St.
CRITERION CENTER, Broadway at 44th St.
EAST 85TH STREET, First Ave. at 85th St.
EAST 86TH STREET CINEMAS, Third Ave. at 86th St.
EASTSIDE PLAYHOUSE, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84TH STREET SIXPLEX, Broadway at 84th St.
59TH STREET EAST CINEMA, 239 E. 59th St.
FILM FORUM, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
FIRST & 62ND CINEMAS, 400 E. 62nd St.
42ND STREET E WALK, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
GOTHAM CINEMA, Third Ave. at 58th St.
KIPS BAY THEATRE, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
LINCOLN PLAZA CINEMAS, Broadway at 63rd St.
LINCOLN SQUARE, Broadway at 68th St.
METRO CINEMA I AND 2, Broadway at 99th St.
MURRAY HILL CINEMAS, 160 E. 34th St.
NEW YORK TWIN, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19TH STREET EAST 6, Broadway at 19th St.
OLYMPIA I AND II, Broadway at 107th St.
ORPHEUM VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
PARIS, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
PARK & 86TH STREET CINEMAS, 125 E. 86th St.
QUAD CINEMA, 34 W. 13th St.
THE SCREENING ROOM, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72ND STREET EAST, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64TH AND 2ND, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62ND & BROADWAY, 62 W. 62nd St.
STATE, Broadway at 45th St.
SUTTON I AND 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
UNION SQUARE, Broadway at 13th St.
VILLAGE EAST CINEMAS, Second Ave. at 12th St.
VILLAGE THEATRE VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
WAVERLY I AND 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
WORLDWIDE CINEMAS, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
ZIEGFELD, 141 W. 54th St.

Will Be 25 in the Year 2000" (1976, Alain Tanner; in French). . . . ¶ A retrospective of the work of Charles Laughton. Jan. 22 at 3, 6, and 9: "The Night of the Hunter" (1955, Charles Laughton). . . . Jan. 23 at 3, 6, and 9: "Advise and Consent" (1962, Otto Preminger). . . . ¶ The films of director Curtis Bernhardt, impresario of the "woman's film." Jan. 24 at 3, 6 and 9: "Miss Sadie Thompson" (1953). . . . ¶ Jan. 25 at 7: "The Kingdom, Part I" (1994, Lars Von Trier).

Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Jan. 19 and 20: "The Edge of the World" (1937, Michael Powell).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—Through Feb. 21: "The American Place: Landscape in the Early Western (and a Few Later Classics)," a retrospective that pairs early silents with modern films, illustrating the development of the celluloid Western landscape. Jan. 20 at 6 and Jan. 23 at 2: "The Great Train Robbery" (†) and "The Wild Bunch" (1969, Sam Peckinpah). . . . Jan. 21 at 2:30 and Jan. 23 at 5: "The Little Train Robbery" (1905, Edwin S. Porter), "Driver of the Deadwood Coach" (1912, director unknown), and "Just Pals" (1920, Jack Ford). . . . Jan. 21 at 6:30 and Jan. 24 at 2:30: "Terrible Ted" (1907, Joseph Golden) and "Unforgiven" (1992, Clint Eastwood). . . . Jan. 22 at 2 and Jan. 24 at 6: "The Road to the Heart" (1909, D. W. Griffith) and "The Gold Rush" (1925, Charles Chaplin). . . . Jan. 22 at 5 and Jan. 25 at 2:30: "Custer's Last Stand" (1910, director unknown) and "Custer's Last Fight" (1926, Thomas H. Ince). . . . ¶ Jan. 20 at 6: "Big as Life 2000: Private Spaces". . . . ¶ Jan. 21 at 8: "The Videotapes and Films of Peter Ungerleider.". . . ¶ Through April 2000: A program of silent films, 1893 to 1928, from the museum's collection.

Museum of Television and Radio, 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through Jan. 30: "Andy's Funhouse: The Andy Kaufman Special" (1979). (Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 1, Thursdays at 6, Fridays at 7, and Saturdays and Sundays at 1). . . . ¶ Through Feb. 13: "Super Bowl: Super Showcase for Commercials." Frank Gifford narrates the ascendance of television's premier venue for new advertisements. . . . ¶ Through March 5: "The Unseen Lucy and Desi: Treasures from the Vault." Rare footage of "I Love Lucy."



At BAM on Jan. 19, "Dottie Gets Spanked," a short film by Todd Haynes.

ROBERT RISKO

The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (332-2100)—Jan. 19 and 20: "The Terrorist" (1999, Santosh Sivan). . . . ¶ "Steady Rollin' Man: The Films of Robert Mugge," a series of music documentaries. Jan. 21, 24, and 27 at 6:20: "Gospel According to Al Green" (1987). . . . Jan. 21-25 at 10:15: "Deep Blues" (1992). . . . Jan. 22 and 25 at 6:20: "The Kingdom of Zydeco" (1994) and "Iguanas in the House" (1996). . . . Jan. 23 at 6:20: "Black Wax" (1982). . . . ¶ Two classic splatter films. Jan. 21 at midnight: "Last House on the Left" (1972, Wes Craven). . . . Jan. 22 at midnight: "I Drink Your Blood" (1971, David E. Durston).

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—The fourth annual "Dance on Camera" festival. Jan. 21 at 2: "Dames and Vedettes". . . . Jan. 21 at 6:30: "Ballet Treasures from Russia". . . . Jan. 22 at 2: "Illusions.". . . . ¶ The Jewish Museum and the Film Society of Lincoln Center present "The New York Jewish Film Festival." Jan. 19 at 1 and 9: "Closed Country" (1999, Kaspar Kasics; in French and German). . . . Jan. 19 at 3:30: "Jew-Boy Levi" (1999, Didi Danquart; in German). . . . Jan. 19 at 6, Jan. 23 at 5:30, and Jan. 24 at 1: "The Mystery of Paul" (1999, Abraham Ségal; in French). . . . Jan. 20 at 1: "The Wandering Jew" (1933, George Roland; in Yiddish). . . . Jan. 20 at 3:30 and Jan. 24 at 9: "Marriage in the Shadows" (1947, Kurt Mätzig; in German). . . . Jan. 20 at 6: "Gloomy Sunday" (1999, Rolf Schübel; in German). . . . Jan. 20 at 8:15, Jan. 22 at 9, and Jan. 24 at 6: "Man Is a Woman" (1997, Jean-Jacques Zilberman; in French) and "Almonds and Wine" (1999, Arnie Lipsey). . . . Jan. 22 at 7:30, Jan. 23 at 4 and 8:30, and Jan. 24 at 3:30: "A Visitor from the Living" (1997, Claude Lanzmann; in French). . . . Jan. 23 at 1: "The Pride of the Firm: The Story of an Apprentice" (1914, Carl Wilhem; silent) and "When I Was Dead" (1916, Ernst Lubitsch; silent). . . . Jan. 25 at 1: "Shylock" (1999, Pierre Lasry) and "Village of Idiots" (1999, Eugene Fedorenko and Rose Newlove). . . . Jan. 25 at 3: "Menelik" (1999, Daniel Wachsmann) and "Women of the Wall" (1999, Faye Lederman). . . . Jan. 25 at 8: "Different from the Others" (1919, Richard Oswald; silent).

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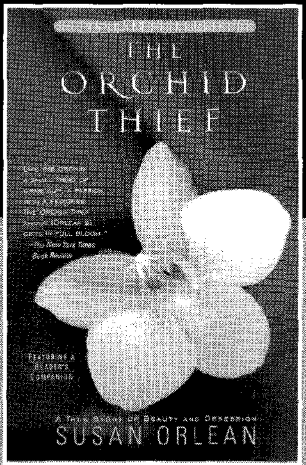

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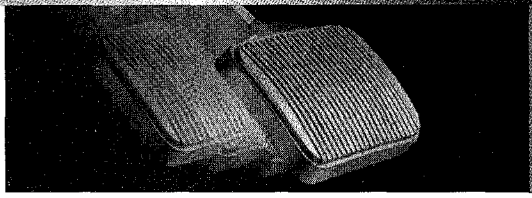

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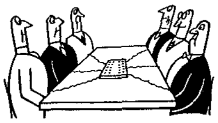
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

Is A.O.L.'s bubble about to burst?



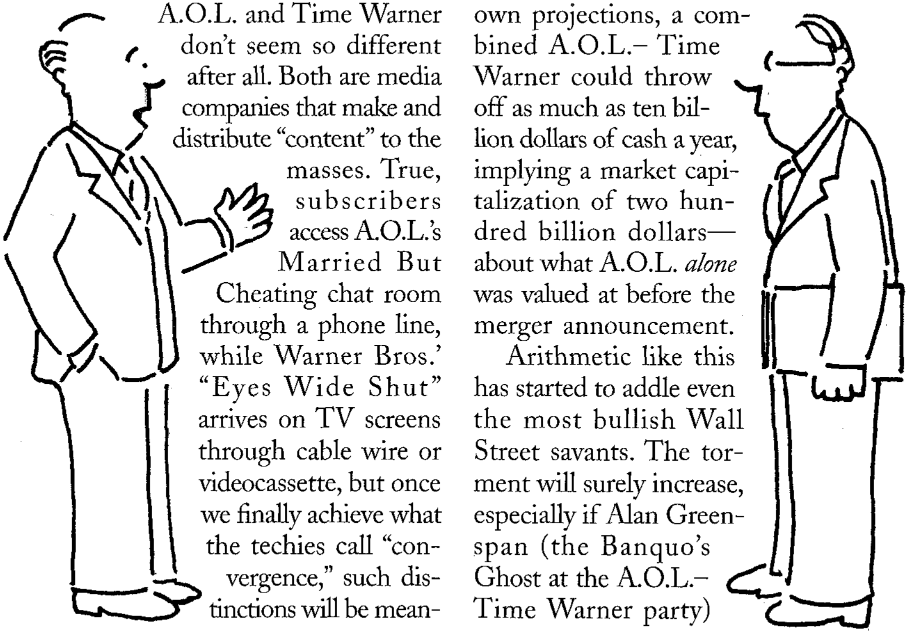
IN "Foreign Correspondent," Alfred Hitchcock's 1940 thriller, Powers, the wizened editor of the New York *Globe*, bemoans his paper's coverage of the situation in prewar Europe, an unedifying mix of thumb-sucking and speculation. "I want a reporter," he declares. "Somebody who doesn't know the difference between an 'ism' and a kangaroo." Last week, reading through the acres of newsprint devoted to the announcement that America Online is to merge with Time Warner—most of which proclaimed the triumph of Internet capitalism—it was hard not to yearn for some of his gin-mill incredulity. A frequently troubled Internet service provider laying claim to the world's premier media conglomerate is certainly a big story, as Powers would agree (especially if, like many of today's editors, he owned stock options in a media company). But the real news is that, far from being the transaction that defines the new century, the A.O.L.–Time Warner merger may turn out to be the deal that marks the end of the Internet stock boom.

For all the backslapping and high-fives at the press conference heralding the agreement, it is merely an engagement, and the dowry is in doubt. The marriage, which won't take place for at least nine months, is what Wall Street old-timers used to call a "funny money" deal, and what their successors refer to as a "stock swap." In return for surrendering control of Time Warner, Ted Turner and his fellow-stockholders will receive payment in A.O.L. stock. So the deal hinges on that stock's price. Of course, A.O.L.'s stock price has been one of the wonders of the modern world—it's what made the deal possible—but its movement hasn't always been one way. Last spring, for example, it fell from eighty dollars to forty dollars, before climbing back up again. If history were to repeat itself—and A.O.L.'s stock has already fallen by ten dollars since the deal was announced—Time Warner's shareholders would rebel, and the merger would collapse, much as the similar, smaller deal between the Internet portal Lycos and USA Networks collapsed last year.

There is a broader point. Internet companies trade at such high prices because they are supposed to be completely different from ordinary firms, so standard methods of valuation, such as comparing a firm's stock price with its earnings, don't apply. (Before last week, A.O.L. had a stock-market capitalization almost twice that of Time Warner, despite the fact that its revenues are only a sixth as large.) But in the wake of the merger announcement, A.O.L. and Time Warner don't seem so different after all. Both are media companies that make and distribute "content" to the masses. True, subscribers access A.O.L.'s Married But Cheating chat room through a phone line, while Warner Bros.' "Eyes Wide Shut" arrives on TV screens through cable wire or videocassette, but once we finally achieve what the techies call "convergence," such distinctions will be meaningless. Households will be equipped with a "broadband pipe"—a souped-up phone line, a cable wire, or a satellite dish—through which zillions of ones and zeroes can be sent, to be translated into moving pictures, words, and sounds by the computer-television-whatever in the corner of the living room.

In this interactive nirvana, there won't be much difference between A.T.&T., Walt Disney, and Beauty.com. Firms' profits (and stock prices) will be determined, just as they have been for decades, by the popularity of their products and by the degree of monopoly power they possess—not by whether they have .com after their name. Since A.O.L.–Time Warner would have many popular products and a lot of market power, its stock would trade at a premium, fetching maybe as much as twenty times the amount of cash that the company generates each year. (Until recently, ten times cash flow was considered a high rating for a media company.) According to the companies' own projections, a combined A.O.L.–Time Warner could throw off as much as ten billion dollars of cash a year, implying a market capitalization of two hundred billion dollars—about what A.O.L. *alone* was valued at before the merger announcement.

Arithmetic like this has started to addle even the most bullish Wall Street savants. The torment will surely increase, especially if Alan Greenspan (the Banquo's Ghost at the A.O.L.–Time Warner party)



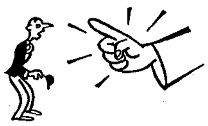
"I don't think this merger between the text and the cartoons is working out."

decides to raise interest rates more sharply than expected at next month's meeting of Federal Reserve governors. For the past year and a half, the Fed has been inadvertently underwriting the Internet bonanza by following a policy of cheap money. This policy was enacted to head off the Asian financial crisis, which it did, but it also produced a speculative bubble in the U.S. stock market and a consumer boom in the U.S. economy. If Greenspan decides, belatedly, that it's time to end the fun, convergence may arrive a lot earlier than expected: the convergence of Internet stock prices and reality.

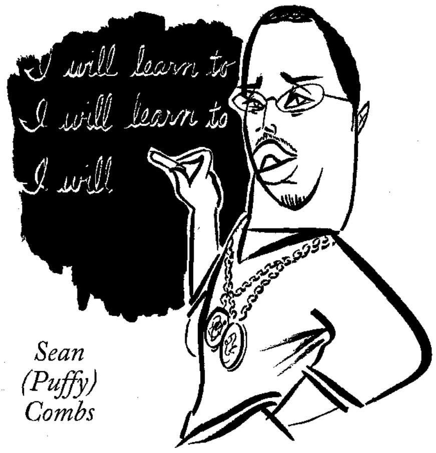
—JOHN CASSIDY

TEMPER, TEMPER DEPT.

What did Puffy Combs learn at anger-management class?



THE arrest just after Christmas of Sean (Puffy) Combs was troubling news not only for the tristate area's furriers and jewellers, who will miss him as a customer if he goes to jail, but also for the staff of a nonprofit agency called the Education and Assistance Corporation. The last time Puffy was arrested—in April, for assaulting a record-company executive—he was ordered to participate in a day of "anger management" training run by E.A.C., which is based in Hempstead, Long Island. Puffy underwent the course one Saturday in November, apparently to little avail, judging by the events of December 27th, when a member of Puffy's entourage sprayed a night club with gunshots after another clubgoer tossed a wad of money at Combs. According to witnesses, Combs, who was indicted last week on weapons-possession charges, fled the scene with his girlfriend, Jennifer Lopez, running eleven red lights in his Lincoln Navigator, and throwing an illegal firearm from the speeding car.



Sean (Puffy) Combs

Attending anger-management school, it turns out, is quite widespread among the entertaining classes—rather like studying cabala or doing yoga, though those activities are not usually undertaken at the direction of a judge. Latrell Sprewell has been required to do it, as have Courtney Love, Mike Tyson, Tommy Lee, and Ol' Dirty Bastard. Naomi Campbell reportedly took a course, too, at the request of her boyfriend.

Robyn Schneider, the division director at E.A.C., was reluctant to talk last week about her high-profile alum's recidivism, but she did explain that the course is designed to rehabilitate more than to punish, and is usually prescribed for a perp whose offense may not be terribly serious but who might go on to commit graver deeds if left uncorrected. Schneider said, "This is a lot more difficult than getting sentenced to community service cleaning up the park, because you are forced to look at yourself, think about your behavior, and talk about it."

E.A.C. provides no V.I.P. room, and Puffy took the class alongside perhaps thirty other offenders, all of whom were required to pay ninety-five dollars for the experience. (Throwing the money at the cashier is not encouraged.) To get the attention of the often surly attendees, Schneider said, the workshop always begins with a mock confrontation between the course instructor and a participating social worker. Rather than joining in the ruckus, the class members are asked to discuss the dynamics of the fight, and thereby begin to think about their own transgressions. The teacher then leads the class in a series of exercises, including one called "thought stopping." Schneider said, "It sounds kind of corny, but it is a technique designed to teach yourself not to act impulsively." (She didn't say whether the technique can be used to stop a member of your entourage from acting impulsively.) All participants are required to join in what Schneider called the "storytelling" part of the day, in which they stand before the class, give an account of the behavior that got them there, and take comments from the group. "It is always easier for a peer to give some comment about behavior than it is for an instructor, so we encourage that," Schneider said. "As long as it is constructive and we keep it under control."

The course also includes role-playing, in which one class member might play, say, a tenant in an apartment building, and another might play the landlord with whom he is engaged in a rent dispute. Schneider would not say whether Puffy participated in the role-playing, but she did say that all members of the class are required to take part to some degree: "We don't allow our clients to sit in the back of the room and fall asleep." Not even if they were out late the night before, club-hopping with a highly insured girlfriend.

—REBECCA MEAD

GREENROOM REPORT

Hillary's "Late Show" jitters.

AT the Ed Sullivan Theatre, where the "Late Show with David Letterman" is taped each evening, Omar Khoury was waiting to learn his fate. Khoury is the actor who plays Mahir, the scantily clad Turkish stud who appears from behind an upstage door each night, his red Speedo filled to capacity, to proclaim "I kiss you, David Letterman," and who then resumes a seemingly endless game of Ping-Pong.

After more than a month on the show, Khoury had survived the initial puzzlement of the audience, most of whom did not know that his character was based on an Internet cult figure. He had even survived Letterman's distaste for the revealing nature of his bathing suit. (The producers simply covered the offending bulge with an electronic blue dot, which soon metamorphosed, with the faux-artlessness that has become Letterman's trademark, into a cardboard blue dot.) But last Wednesday Mahir was up against his toughest challenge yet: the much ballyhooed appearance by First Lady Hillary Clinton.

Late last year, as Mrs. Clinton prepared for her Senate battle against Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Letterman (who in-

ILLUSTRATION BY TOM BACHTELL

creasingly seems to be running a show intended only for New Yorkers, and God bless him for it) began to ridicule the First Lady for her shameless appeals to local voters, particularly her pro-Jewish rhetoric and her newfound Yankee fandom. And then came Campaign 2000: a regular feature on the show in which Letterman and his executive producer, Rob Burnett, set aside a few minutes to chronicle their attempts to book Mrs. Clinton as a guest.

Last week—influenced, some suggested, by a poll showing that most New Yorkers favored the appearance—Hillary capitulated, and on January 12th the Secret Service swept the Ed Sullivan Theatre for the first time since 1993, when Al Gore appeared on the show. The First Lady's presence inspired an unprecedented formality at the "Late Show"; a surprising number of staff members wore suits and ties. The same reserve extended to the comedy. The "Late Show" creative team discarded certain ideas as unsportsmanlike; for example, there would be no surprise cameo by Giuliani, although the Mayor has appeared on the show nearly twenty times. And Letterman, who showed no signs of the illness that would force emergency heart surgery two days later, was playfully respectful—the hot seat that some Clinton supporters had feared turned out to be merely warm.

One segment—a Top Ten list, read by the First Lady, that gave "Reasons I, Hillary Clinton, Finally Decided to Appear on the 'Late Show' "—provoked a minor skirmish. "We had a very mild back and forth about the Top Ten list, which our people and their people prepared together," Rob Burnett said. "Hillary was supposed to say, 'As First Lady, it's my job to visit disaster areas.' They thought that the joke was too mean—that if she said it to Dave she might come off looking bad." The joke was dropped.

That left only the issue of Mahir to resolve. Was it appropriate to let the Turkish love machine intrude on Mrs. Clinton's big night? "That's the question of the day," Burnett said just hours before the show. "He's here and ready to go, but it's Dave's call whether he opens the door or not."

About fifteen minutes into the program, after a walk-on by Walter Cronkite in which the venerable newsman urged Letterman "not to be a jackass," Letterman settled the matter by looking to his right. The upstage door opened, and Mahir, blue dot and all, delivered his catchphrase to an appreciative audience. It was business as usual—almost. When the door closed, Letterman turned and looked into the camera.

"The Secret Service put the dot on that guy tonight," he said.

—BEN GREENMAN

THE URGE TO MERGE

In a stunning development that sent shock waves through the worlds of entertainment, the Internet, and rock-star-sperm donation, federal regulators hinted today that they would approve the merger between America Online and Time Warner, but would not give their assent to a similar alliance between the rock musicians Melissa Etheridge and David Crosby.

On paper, according to Justice Department sources, the two transactions are strikingly similar. Both parent companies (A.O.L., Etheridge) are allying themselves with once glorious but now bloated entities that have a history of bingeing and indebtedness (Time Warner, Crosby).

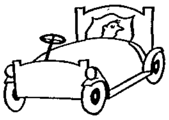
The acquired companies have both attempted multiple comebacks, going so far as to add new parts to spruce themselves up: in Time Warner's case, the acquisition of Turner Broadcasting System; in Crosby's case, the addition of a new liver.

One Justice Department official said that the only substantive difference between the two mergers appeared to be one of size. It was unclear, however, which merger was bigger, since, as the official pointed out, "it's very difficult to assess just how big David Crosby is."

—ANDY BOROWITZ

DETROIT POSTCARD

A new car that likes to listen.



With cars getting sleeker by the day, you wouldn't have thought that the most exciting thing at the North American International Auto Show, in Detroit last week, would have been a dumb-looking orange box on wheels. But Ford's new 24•7, which looks like the kind of car a child might draw, overshadowed any number of sexy convertibles. It is a car that J. Mays, Ford's head of design, says was conceived for the generation of drivers who grew up with computers. The 24•7 is plain on the outside, and even plainer on the inside, which doesn't have a conventional dashboard. Instead, behind the steering wheel is a blank gray panel that functions as a huge computer screen. The driver operates the car by talking to the screen.

"This car is for people who buy the iMac, which was the hot rod of the nineties," Mays said.

The 24•7, which isn't being manufactured yet—it is what designers call a concept car, produced to test the viability of certain ideas—isn't aimed at thirty-year-old software billionaires. Presumably, they will go on buying Ferraris and Aston Martins. Mays's concept car is for the average Palm Pilot-toting computer geek who wants basic transportation and thinks it is perfectly normal to expect his car to be connected to the Internet and to operate by a series of voice commands.

Mays gave the exterior a generic look partly because he wanted the car to evoke the basic, no-nonsense styling of, say, the Gap, but also because he thought that too strong a shape would distract people from the ideas inside. "If there was too much styling, you wouldn't get past it," he said.

Thus the deadpan exterior, which has a friendly air and stops just short of being cute. Inside, the car is softer, but seems eerily unfinished, since there are no visible gauges or controls. At the Detroit auto show, Mays sat in the driver's seat of a 24•7 wagon. "System startup," he said in a low, firm voice, pushing a button beside the steering wheel. Immediately, the blank dashboard lit up with the names and pictures of four members of an imaginary family.

"Select driver Natalie," he said, and instantly the entire dashboard reconfigured itself with a background of blue flowers, a couple of family photographs, and a speedometer. "Natalie is the wife in our imaginary family, and she doesn't like a lot of complicated gauges. She likes to think about her garden," Mays said.

In the scenario that had been programmed into the car, Natalie was going to have lunch with a friend. "Find Café Claude," Mays said to the car. Natalie's pictures became a map, with directions to the restaurant, which the car's computer, using a Global Positioning System, had determined from its present location.

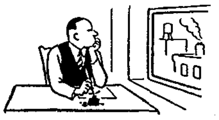
"Now let's try something else," Mays said. "Select driver Jack." Natalie's flowers disappeared, and the dashboard remade itself for her seventeen-year-old son. A tachometer appeared alongside the speedometer, and the background turned into a black graphic pattern that would have been at home on a heavy-metal CD. "Play CD two," Mays ordered the car, and Jack's rock music came on. Next, Mays ordered the car to help Jack find a local rock club. "Find South Dock Warehouse," he said, and then, releasing the button so that he could talk to me without the car thinking he was talking to it, he said that if Jack was so inclined he could take the map that had just appeared on the dashboard and, with another couple of commands, E-mail it to a friend.

"Transportation has not isolated you in this car," Mays said. "You can talk on the phone, you can get on the Internet and read your E-mail."

Of course, isolation used to be one of the pleasures of driving. In the wired car, the outside world isn't kept at bay, the way it is in, say, a Porsche 911. Apparently, being connected all the time, even on the road, is what the interactive generation values above all. The 24•7 is one computer that had better be crashproof.

—PAUL GOLDBERGER

POSTSCRIPT



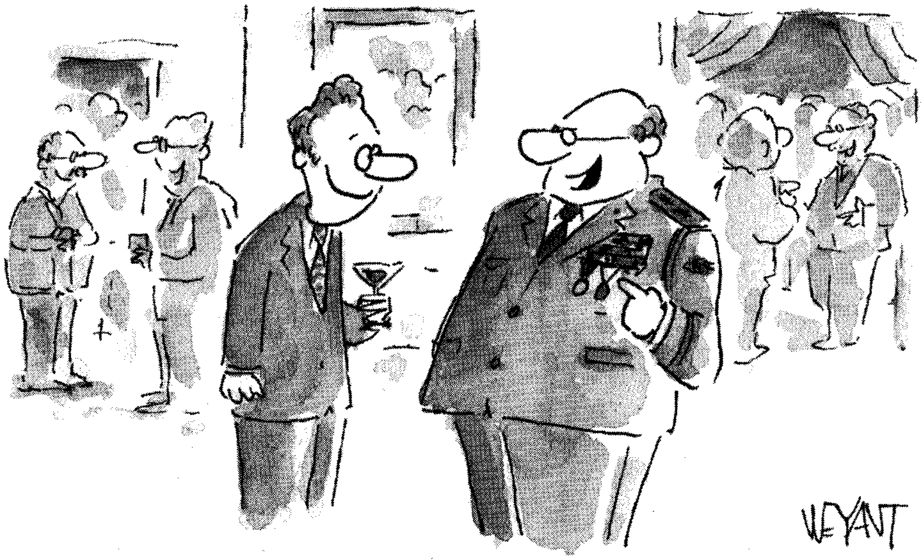
When Jervis Anderson, who died over the holidays, joined *The New Yorker* as a staff writer, in 1968, he was thirty-six years old and pretty much fully formed. He was courtly, a little solemn (except when he exploded in laughter, as he did frequently), deliberate, precise, and exceptionally tweedy (except in summer, when he wore safari clothes)—a yeasty product of British colonialism and West Indian anticolonialism, leavened by Harlem and the Upper West Side.

Born and reared in Jamaica, Anderson apprenticed at the *Daily Gleaner*, the island's newspaper of record, and at *Public Opinion*, the weekly voice of its intellectual and political avant-garde. From *Public Opinion's* editor, the independence leader Norman Manley, Anderson learned the gentle politics that would inform his writing without ever distorting it—a moderate, Fabian-style democratic socialism. In his mid-twenties, Anderson came north to attend New York University, and, despite this country's scandalous indifference to cricket, ended up staying. He soon found himself writing for journals associated with the group known as the New York intellectuals. (He was one of the few human beings who managed to remain on warm terms with both Norman Podhoretz, the editor of *Commentary*, and Irving Howe, the editor of *Dissent*, after their bitter parting of the political ways.) William Shawn, impressed, gave him a little office at *The New Yorker* and an even littler drawing account, and sent him out to write sketches for The Talk of the Town.

Anderson's byline did not appear in the magazine until 1972, but when it did it accompanied a corker: a masterly three-part Profile of A. Philip Randolph, published as a book the following year and still in print. It was a telling choice of subject. Randolph was the single greatest figure in the modern civil-rights movement before Martin Luther King, Jr., but he was also an anti-Communist, a trade unionist, an opponent of black nationalism, and an integrationist—all of which made him, in certain circles, deeply unfashionable. As a result, he had never received the kind of attention he deserved. Jervis Anderson righted that wrong.

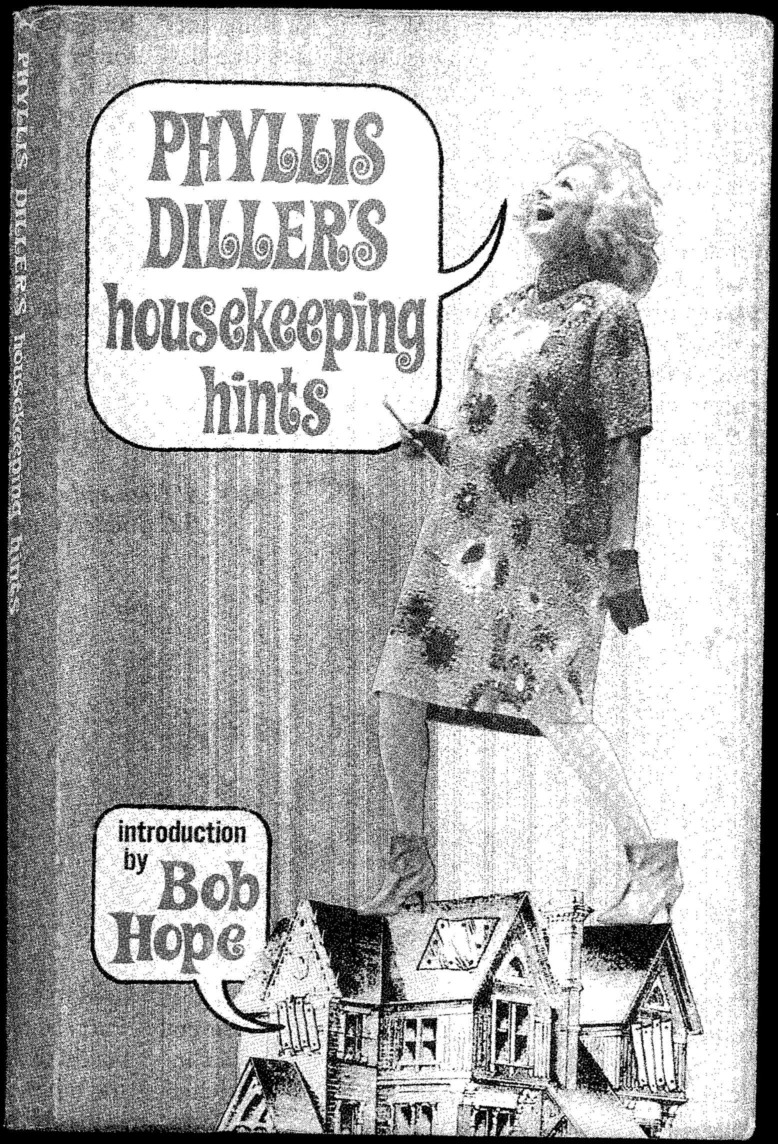
Anderson went on to publish many other fine pieces here, including a monumental cultural history of Harlem and, during the nineteen-nineties, Profiles of Derek Walcott, the poet, and Wynton Marsalis, the musician. What turned out to be his last book, a biography of Randolph's equally unfashionable lieutenant, Bayard Rustin, came out in 1997. The following year, Anderson retired from the magazine, but not from his life as a writer and scholar. At sixty-seven, he had just embarked on a book about the novelist Ralph Ellison, whom he had profiled, memorably, in *The New Yorker*. Ellison was yet another figure who fell deeply out of style during the sixties and seventies, and who nevertheless achieved immense things, as a literary artist and also as an advocate for black America. Jervis Anderson wrote about heroes, which is a more exacting discipline than writing about villains, and he did it well, and he contributed far more than his share to the preservation of American memory.

—HENDRIK HERTZBERG



"This one's for not asking and this one's for not telling."

June 8, 1967. You purchase as gag gift for older sister's wedding shower.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THE CAMPAIGN

Barnyard platitudes.

POLITICIANS are never quite so reprehensible as when they are talking to farmers. "I hear tell," the Vice-President of the United States said a few days ago in Davenport, Iowa, fertilizing an elderly audience, "there are gonna be some *caucuses* around here in a couple of weeks."

Golly. Actually, that was the next stop: "Goll-lee," Al Gore exclaimed in Muscatine, with an exasperated sigh, as he recalled the depredations of the Nixon Administration—the recollection is part of his standard stump autobiography, the part where he explains why he was so disillusioned by politics as a young man. Of course, a new generation of Iowans will now be able to recall how they became disillusioned with politics when the Vice-President, a Harvard graduate, came to town and insulted their intelligence by trying to sound like a rube. But the shamelessness was not limited to style. As Gore spoke in Davenport, his aides passed out a page titled "Report Card on Bill Bradley's Record: Agriculture Issues." There followed a string of failing grades in such areas as Disaster Assistance, Ethanol, Price Supports, and Agriculture Funding, with accompanying commentary: "Bradley repeatedly voted to reduce or eliminate price-support programs for farmers on products including corn, wheat, soybeans, and dairy."

Indeed, Bill Bradley's relatively honorable record on agriculture would constitute a solid reason for any Americans who happen not to be farmers to vote for him, were it not for the small detail that he is desperately trying to run away from it in this election. The day after Gore played hayseed, Bradley launched into wholesale agripandering on a farm in Indianola. The candidate stood in a frigid corrugated-tin shed, which appeared to have been recently decorated by a descendant of Grant Wood—pitchfork, shovel, and assorted other implements artfully hung behind a podium. Happily, I found myself standing next to David Yepsen of the Des Moines *Register*, who informed me that the piece of equipment just outside was a manure spreader and then offered to provide "closed-captioning for the ag-impaired," an offer I seized upon immediately. There was a fair amount of ag-arcana, but a very clear bottom line: Bradley was apologizing for being uneducated in agricultural issues (translation: unwilling to pander) in the past and was now prepared to offer farmers all sorts of blandishments, including continued government support of ethanol—a near-useless corn-based gasoline additive that has received an estimated ten billion dollars in public subsidies since 1980, more than half of which may have found its way to the giant Archer Daniels Midland company, whose executives contribute far more money to politicians, far more effectively, than the Chinese ever did.

Al Gore and Bill Bradley

One wonders about this, on several grounds. Politicians have forever indulged themselves in misty-eyed Jeffersonian rhapsodies about yeoman farmers. But, as Congressman Barney Frank of Massachusetts once asked, "Why should the family farm be treated any differently from the family shoe store?" And why should agriculture be discouraged from reorganizing itself into larger, more efficient units, as the rest of the American economy has over the past twenty years? And why should those larger units, like Archer Daniels Midland, get anything from the government at all, except, perhaps, antitrust scrutiny? "This is not my favorite part of the campaign," a Bradley aide muttered, as the candidate posed in front of a tractor.

On a more pragmatic level, one wonders what political advantage Bill Bradley gains by debasing his candidacy in this way. Al Gore's corny embrace of the standard Democratic agricultural constituencies is understandable; he, and they, represent the Party's establishment. But Bradley is, allegedly, an insurgent—if a somewhat surgeless one. He doesn't seem comfortable, or very convincing, telling farmers what they want to hear; and he isn't doing very well in Iowa, where Gore remains a solid twenty points ahead in the polls. Bradley has taken some admirable risks in this campaign—proposing a six-hundred-and-fifty-billion-dollar health-insurance plan, and sweeping gun-control and campaign-finance reforms—but there has been a dull, blabby quality to his crusade. It is a Rhodes Scholar's rebellion: polite, Olympian, vaguely disdainful. Like most Rhodesies, he is an ambitious man who finds ambition unseemly, especially in his opponents. He has been willing to make high-minded pronouncements, but unwilling—unlike John McCain—to tell unpleasant truths.

Bradley's audiences are the most adoring of any candidate's this year; they are attracted to his demeanor, his serenity, rather than to anything he actually says. They give him more emotional sustenance than he dispenses; his is an austere, puritanical brand of idealism. He has managed to win over a significant number of Party activists and he has a corps of youthful campaign workers that any of the other candidates would kill for, but he hasn't cut through the fog of political blather to make an impression on the semi-apathetic majority that will make the difference on election day.

"There is a need," Al Gore said, very effectively, in Davenport, "for good, crisp, clear judgments about how to move our country into the future." The word "crisp" seemed particularly resonant. It is what Bradley's candidacy has not yet been: crisp, or particularly accessible to the non-high-minded masses. Gore, by contrast, seems eminently competent (when he's not making a fool of himself), which is all an incumbent needs to be. —JOE KLEIN

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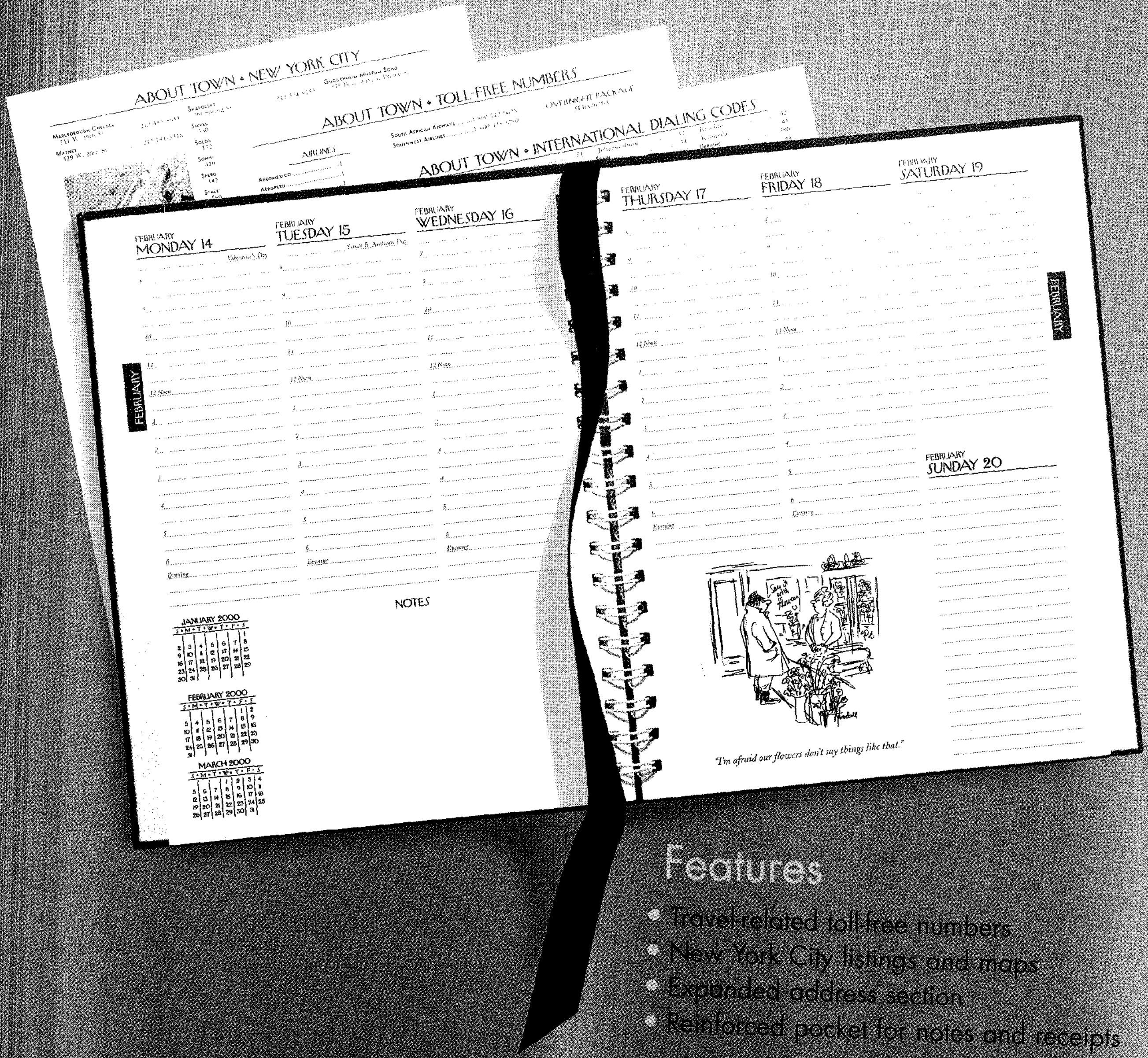
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DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL SECURITY

THE REAL BIN LADEN

By mythologizing him, the government has made him even more dangerous.

BY MARY ANNE WEAVER

IN August of 1998, the mysterious Saudi multimillionaire Osama bin Laden was declared Washington's most-wanted fugitive. The previous February, he had called on his followers to kill Americans around the world, and now he was being accused of the bombings of two United States Embassies, in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Not long after the embassy attacks, American cruise missiles struck targets in Afghanistan believed to be bin Laden training camps, killing a number of people but not bin Laden, who was then forty-three years old. Today, a year and a half later, after one of the costliest and most complicated international criminal investigations in United States history, the government seems divided on how to deal with him. Every strategy has backfired, from covert operations, to what is now euphemistically called "bringing bin Laden to justice," to our missile attacks, whose clear but unstated objective was to kill bin Laden and his key aides. Some American officials I spoke to conceded that they could only hope reports that bin Laden is seriously ill—reports he has denied—prove to be true.

Perhaps as bedevilling as anything else has been bin Laden's silence in the past eleven months. Last February, he "disappeared" somewhere in the mountains of Afghanistan. Then, during the summer, the C.I.A. issued a series of intelligence reports warning that bin Laden appeared to be about to strike again. These findings, based on telephone intercepts, were greeted skeptically by some within the United States intelligence community. Other American intelligence warnings came and went, and there were scores of arrests around the world—most recently last month, when an Iraqi, an Algerian, and eleven Jordanians were arrested in Amman after entering Jordan from Afghanistan. All the men had trained with explosives at one of bin Laden's military camps and, according to Jordanian officials, were in the early stages of planning a series of terrorist attacks against Biblical and tourist sites. Some days afterward, an Algerian named Ahmed Ressam was detained as he entered the United States with an arsenal of bomb-making components in the trunk of his car; arrests of other Algerians quickly followed, in and around Seattle, in Vermont, and in New York. According to knowledgeable officials in the American intelligence community, Ressam, along with a number of the others now under arrest, has been linked to Algeria's extremist Armed Islamic Group—an organization that bin Laden has been funding for a number of years.

As a result of the intelligence warnings, the Secretary of Defense cancelled a scheduled trip abroad. On the anniversary of the embassy bombings and during the millennium celebrations, Americans around the world were told to be alert. At its Washington headquarters, the F.B.I. abruptly suspended public tours.

These developments, however, have obscured the larger questions facing the government: how to respond to an enemy who is a man and not a state; who has no structured organization, no headquarters, and no fixed address; and whose followers live in different countries and feel a loyalty not so much to that man as to the ideology of militant Islam. According to several intelligence officials, the Clinton Administration's answer, to a large extent, has been to do precisely what Osama bin Laden himself has been doing over the years: it has mythologized him.

In November of 1998, three months after the embassy bombings, the Justice Department handed down a two-hundred-and-thirty-eight-count indictment charging bin Laden with conspiracy to kill Americans and accusing him of involvement (without detailing his specific role) in much more than the embassy attacks. It charged that, as the leader of a terrorist conspiracy for nearly ten years, bin Laden had attempted to procure the components of nuclear and

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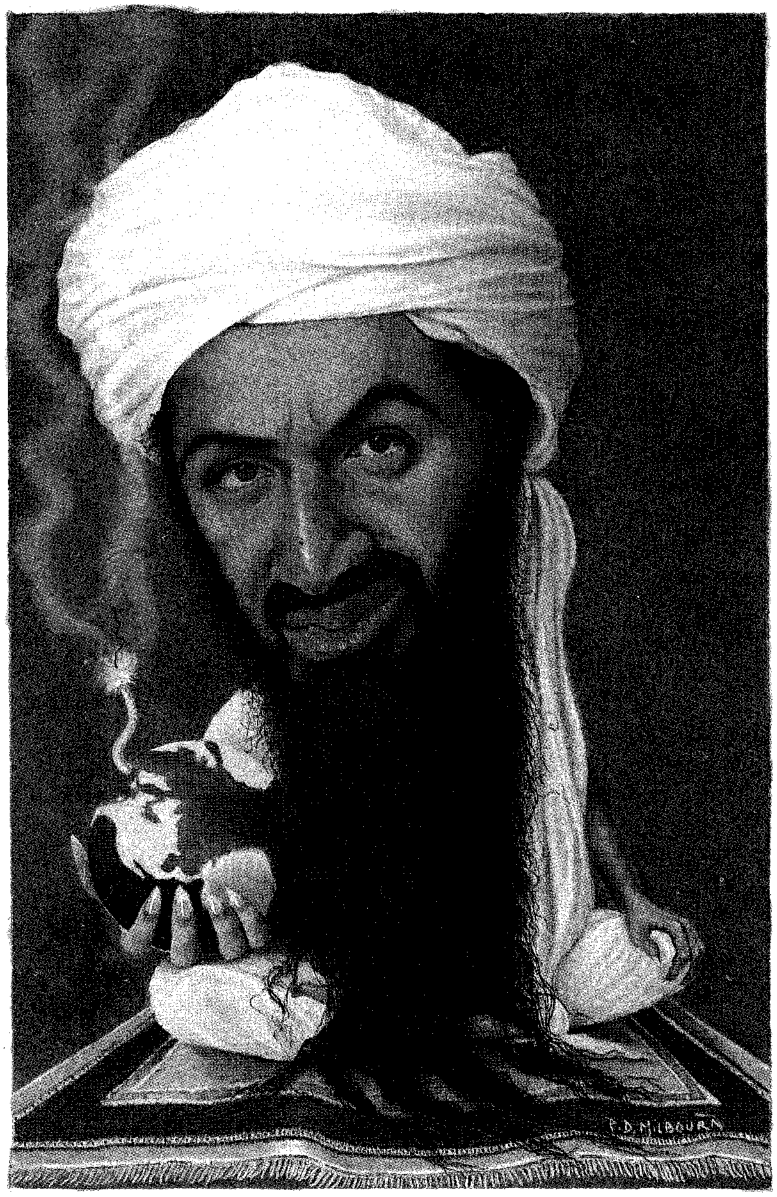
chemical weapons. According to the indictment, bin Laden also had a logistical and training role in the 1993 killing in Somalia of eighteen American servicemen, one of whose bodies was seen on television being dragged through the streets by a mob. (In an interview broadcast on CNN in May of 1997, bin Laden himself boasted that his followers had played a role in those deaths.)

Yet the indictment did not provide persuasive evidence that bin Laden personally commanded the bombings of our embassies in East Africa, and the government has still not produced such evidence. Ambassador Robert Oakley, who led the State Department's Counter-Terrorism Office, called bin Laden's boast of involvement in the Somali deaths "preposterous." And when President Clinton said that bin Laden was responsible for a 1995 assassination attempt in Addis Ababa against Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian President, one member of Egypt's largest militant Islamist group to whom I spoke was outraged: the group, Gama'a al-Islamiya, had labored for more than a year to plan and execute the attempt, he said. Given bin Laden's genius for self-promotion, a worried United States official told me, the Administration's unsophisticated attempts at international spin control only help him. In fact, the real bin Laden is more interesting, and perhaps more dangerous, than the fantasies that have surrounded him.



An acquaintance of bin Laden's from the seventies remembers him as a free-spending, fun-loving young man in Beirut's night clubs and bars.

PATRICK MILBOURNE

OSAMA BIN MUHAMMAD BIN AWAD BIN LADEN was born in 1955, the youngest of some twenty surviving sons of one of Saudi Arabia's wealthiest and most prominent families. He is part puritanical Wahhabi, the dominant school of Islam in Saudi Arabia, yet at one time he may have led a very liberated social life. He is part feudal Saudi, an aristocrat who, from time to time, would retreat with his father to the desert and live in a tent. And he is of a Saudi generation that came of age during the rise of OPEC, with the extraordinary wealth that accompanied it: a generation whose religious fervor or political zeal, complemented by government airline tickets, led thousands to fight a war in a distant Muslim land. That Pan-Islamic effort, whose fighters were funded, armed, and trained by the C.I.A., eventually brought some twenty-five thousand Islamic militants, from more than fifty countries, to combat the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The United States, intentionally or not, had launched Pan-Islam's first jihad, or holy war, in eight centuries.

Bin Laden's father was a Yemeni who had immigrated to the kingdom and had made a fortune by building a construction company into a financial empire. Osama's mother, a Syrian beauty, was his father's fourth, and final, official wife (the other three were Saudis), and she was considered by the conservative bin Laden family to be far ahead of her time. (For instance, she refused to wear a burka over her Chanel suits when she travelled abroad.) Osama was her only son. Tutors and nannies, bearers and butlers formed a large part of his life. He and his half brothers—and, to a lesser extent, his thirty half sisters—were playmates of the children of the kingdom's most prominent families, including various royal princes and princesses. Nonetheless, his childhood has been described as an often lonely one. "It must have been very difficult for him," one family friend told me. "In a country that is obsessed with parentage, with who your great-grandfather was, Osama was almost a double outsider. His paternal roots are in Yemen, and, within the family, his mother was a double outsider as well—she was neither Saudi nor Yemeni but Syrian."

In 1968, Osama's father (along with his American pilot) died in a helicopter crash, and Osama, at the age of thirteen, inherited eighty million dollars. When he was fifteen, he had his own stable of horses, and at nineteen he entered King Abdul-Aziz University, in Jidda, where he received a civil-engineering degree in 1979. A barber who saw him often in the early nineteen-seventies has told the *Mideast Mirror* that in Beirut's flashy night clubs and bars his client was known as a free-spending, fun-loving young man—"a heavy drinker who often ended up embroiled in shouting matches and fistfights with other young men over an attractive night-club dancer or barmaid."

There is no evidence that bin Laden showed any interest in politics before 1979, when three events shook the Middle East: Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty; the Soviets invaded Afghanistan; and the Iranian Revolution toppled the Shah. Years later, looking back on the invasion of Afghanistan, bin Laden told an interviewer from the Arabic-language *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, "I was enraged, and went there at once."

Friends of the bin Laden family told me that the truth wasn't quite so dramatic. Osama spent the first years of the war travelling throughout Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf and raising millions of dollars for the jihad. Some of the funding came directly from the Saudi government, some from official mosques, and some from the kingdom's financial and business élite—including his late father's construction empire, the Bin Laden Group, which by then had interests on three continents.

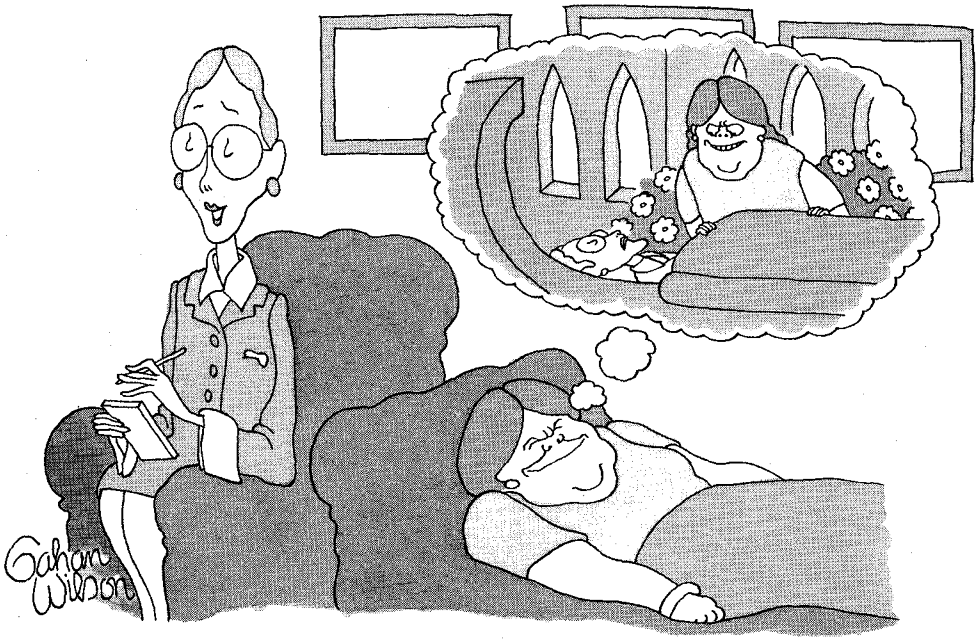
In 1984, bin Laden moved to Peshawar, a Pakistani border town near the Khyber Pass which served as the key staging area for the jihad in Afghanistan. That year, I and other journalists in the region began to hear of a man known as the Good Samaritan or the Saudi Prince. He would arrive unannounced, it was said, at hospitals where wounded Afghan and Arab fighters had been brought. He was lean and elegant, and dressed in the traditional *shalwar kameez* of the Afghan tribes—a blousy knee-length tunic top—over tailored trousers of fine English cloth, and he always wore English custom-made Beal Brothers boots. According to the stories that we heard, he was soft-spoken, and went from bed to bed dispensing cashews and English chocolates to the wounded and carefully noting each man's name and address. Weeks later, the man's family would receive a generous check.

Soon we began to hear other tales. In the ungovernable tribal areas on the Pakistani-Afghan frontier, and in the military training camps outside Peshawar and in Afghanistan, jihad trainees and clerics began to speak of another enigmatic Saudi. He had arrived in an unmarked military transport plane, and brought in bulldozers and other pieces of heavy equipment, which he deployed to design and construct defensive tunnels and storage depots, and to cut roads through the deep valleys of Afghanistan. According to one frequently told story, the man often drove one of the bulldozers himself across the precipitous mountain peaks, exposing himself to strafing from Soviet helicopter gunships. This man also turned out to be bin Laden, and the equipment that he brought in was furnished by the Bin Laden Group.

FOUR years had passed since the C.I.A. began providing weapons and funds—eventually totalling more than three billion dollars—to the various Afghan resistance groups, all of which were, to varying degrees, fundamentalist in religion, autocratic in politics, and venomously anti-American. During (and also after) the jihad in Afghanistan, bin Laden met frequently with Hassan al-Turabi, an erudite Islamist who now effectively controls the rigid Islamic government in Sudan. He dined regularly with President Zia ul-Haq, Pakistan's military ruler, who was a conduit for the C.I.A. arms. He cultivated generals from the Pakistani intelligence service. And he befriended not only some of the most anti-Western of the Afghan resistance leaders fighting the jihad but also the Egyptian cleric Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, who is now serving a life sentence in a Minnesota prison for conspiracy to "wage a war of urban terrorism" against the United States.

The C.I.A. station chief in Pakistan from 1986 to 1989 was Milt Bearden, an avuncular, barrel-chested man with an easy smile. He arrived with the first shipments of Stinger missiles that Washington dispatched to the combatants, and he spent a good deal of time in the mountains with the resistance groups. Not long ago, I asked Bearden, who is now retired, if he had known bin Laden during the war years.

"No," he replied. "Did I know that he was out there? Yes, I did, but did I say that this tall, slim, ascetic Saudi was instrumental? No, I did not. There were a lot of bin Ladens who came to do jihad, and they unburdened us a lot. These guys were bringing in up to twenty to twenty-five million dollars a month from other Saudis and Gulf Arabs to underwrite the war. And that is a lot of money. It's an extra two hundred to three hundred million dollars a year. And this is what bin Laden did. He spent most of the war as a fund-raiser, in Pe-



"Are you there now, Linda? Are you in that happy, safe place that brings you peace and assurance and deep contentment?"

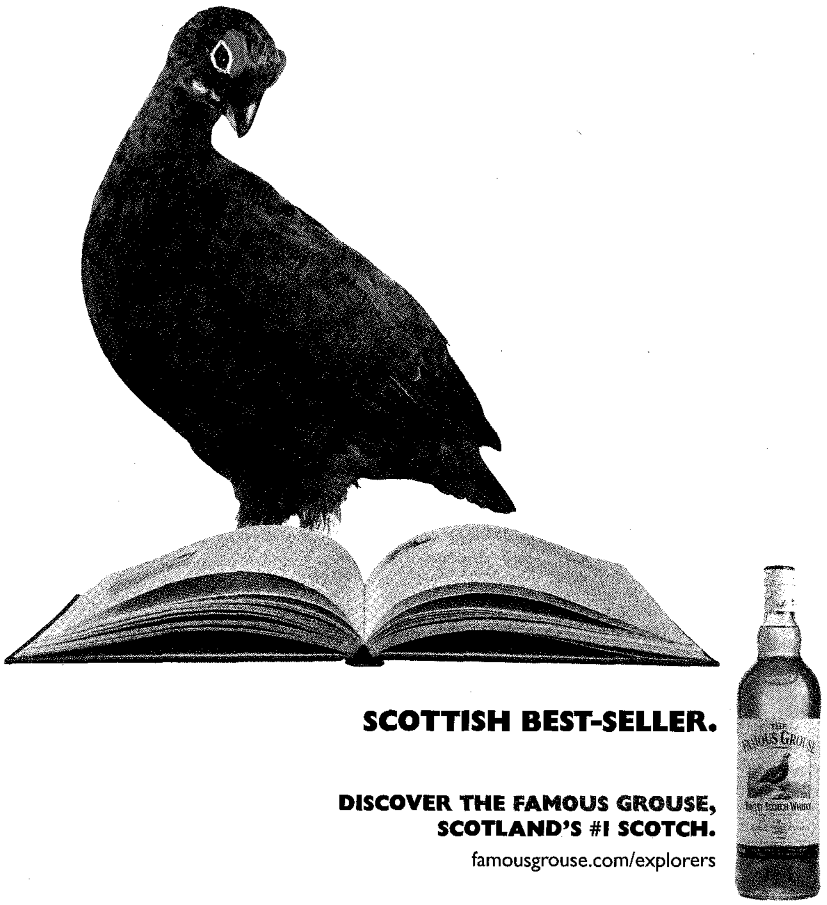
shawar. He was not a valiant warrior on the battlefield."

According to Bearden, bin Laden and the Saudi contingent "fought in only one important battle that I know of: the battle of Ali Khel"—in Paktia province, not far from the area struck by United States cruise missiles in August of 1998. "The Soviets ran out of steam just before we ran out of supplies. There were perhaps twenty or twenty-five Saudi *shaheeds*"—martyrs. Bin Laden, fighting under the nom de guerre Abu Abdullah, appeared to have modelled himself on the twelfth-century military hero Salah al-Din, who effectively checked the Crusaders and reconquered Jerusalem.

"As time went on," Bearden told me, "the story of the battle of Ali Khel grew, as did that of the Saudis' battlefield role. Part of the myth of bin Laden and of the Saudi fighters sprang from this. The U.S. government, along with others, sang the ballad of the Saudi *shaheeds*, and, dollar for dollar, King Fahd matched our funds. We put five hundred million dollars into Afghanistan in 1987 alone, and the Saudis matched us bill for bill."

In 1989, when the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan in defeat, bin Laden returned to Jidda, and to his place in the family's business empire. But with the collapse of the oil boom Saudi Arabia faced growing economic and social problems. According to the State Department's annual human-rights reports, the kingdom's royal family was also becoming increasingly repressive and corrupt. Bin Laden began to criticize the feudal Saudi regime openly, and to support its opposition groups. His half brothers and some of his royal friends—including Prince Turki, the chief of Saudi intelligence, and Prince Salman, the governor of Riyadh, with whom bin Laden had worked during the jihad—attempted to restrain him, and for a time he devoted himself to personal matters: expanding his holdings (which are based, in large part, on more than sixty companies, many of them in the West) and producing heirs. He now has four wives, carefully chosen for their political connections or their pedigree, and some ten children.

Bin Laden's quietude, however, did not last long, as he increasingly came under the sway of two of Saudi Arabia's most militant clerics, Sheikhs Safar Hawali and Salman Awdah—whose views are considered revolutionary by the Saudi



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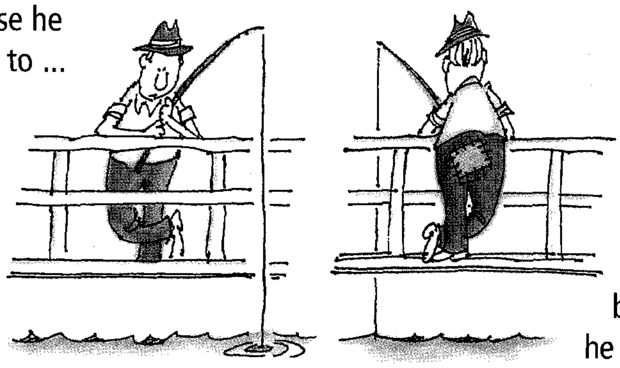

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regime, and whose fatwas, or religious opinions, bin Laden still propagates. In 1991, the royal family expelled him from the kingdom for his political activities, and his family publicly renounced him. He sought refuge in Sudan.

After that, bin Laden's political evolution accelerated. His departure from his homeland coincided with the arrival there of tens of thousands of United States troops for the Persian Gulf War. When the Saudi regime permitted them not only to occupy its soil but to remain after the victory, bin Laden's antipathy to both the regime and the United States was inflamed. In his mind, the United States had become to Saudi Arabia what the Soviet Union had been to Afghanistan: an infidel occupation force propping up a corrupt, repressive, and un-Islamic government.

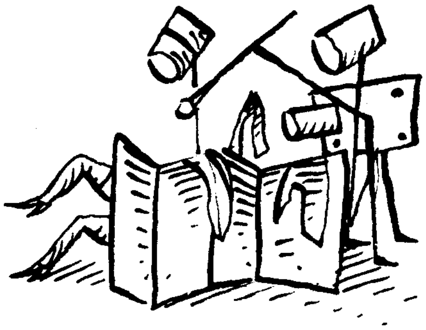
DURING five years of exile in Sudan, from 1991 to 1996, bin Laden placed his wealth—a fortune now estimated at more than two hundred and fifty million dollars, largely in foreign bank accounts—at the disposal of militant Islamist groups around the world. Whether he retains access to his family's fortune, which is estimated to be worth some five billion dollars, is a matter of dispute.

While bin Laden was based in Sudan, the Saudi regime warned him more than once that it would countenance no actions directed against the Saudi throne. He ignored the warnings. In the early nineties—during the Bush Administration, and presumably with the knowledge of the United States—the Saudis secretly dispatched hit teams to Khartoum with a contract on bin Laden's life. And in 1994, as a result of urging by the United States, the normally cautious House of Saud took what one Saudi expert told me was an astonishing step: it antagonized its fundamentalist community by publicly stripping bin Laden of his citizenship, citing his "irresponsible behavior and his refusal to obey instructions issued to him." The kingdom also stripped him of much of his Saudi property and many of his assets.

Then, inexplicably, in November of 1996, the Saudi royal family invited bin Laden to return home. Or so he claimed, in an interview with *Al-Quds al-Arabi,* and he added that the regime had also offered to restore his assets and the properties it had seized. In exchange, bin Laden was expected to swear an oath of allegiance to King Fahd. He refused. Saudi officials will neither confirm nor deny that the offer was made; indeed, over the years they have consistently refused to comment on anything about bin Laden—a testament, perhaps, to their continuing bewilderment about how to cope with him.

According to a declassified State Department report, when bin Laden was in Sudan he established and financed three terrorist training camps in the north of the country; bought two farms in the east; and paid to transport some five hundred "Afghan Arabs," as the foreign jihad fighters are called, to Sudan from Pakistan after Pakistani officials threatened to expel them. He mixed war and profit, establishing new companies and entering joint ventures with the Sudanese government. More and more Afghan Arabs came to Sudan to support his operations there. Some were instructors in his military training camps; others, management experts and economists, ran his businesses. Still others served as liaisons among a dozen or so bin Laden-supported militant Islamist groups.

Yet David Long, a former official in the State Department who is considered an expert both on the Saudis and on terrorism, said, "Is Osama bin Laden the exclusive font of terrorist evil? No. This is an informal brotherhood we are seeing now, whose members can draw on each other; it's not a clear, sterling network. Bin Laden's organization"—an umbrella group called *al-Qaeda,* or "the base"—"is not a terrorist organization in the traditional sense. It's more a clearing house from which other groups elicit funds, training, and logistical support. It's a chameleon, an amoeba, which constantly changes shape according to the whims of its leadership, and that leadership is Osama bin Laden. It's highly personalized." Long went on, "Bin Laden is a facilitator—a practitioner of the most ancient way of doing things in the Middle East. He does not have the brilliant, top-of-the-art international structure of Abu Nidal"—the Palestinian terrorist of the nineteen-seventies and mid-eighties. "If you were to kill Osama tomorrow, the Osama organization would disappear, but all the networks would still be there." Long believes that the more serious threat bin Laden poses to the interests of the United States lies in his ability to destabilize friendly Arab governments, such as Saudi Arabia's, whose support is geopolitically crucial to us. (In fact, bin Laden very likely sees his battle with the House of Saud as his most important struggle; from his perspective, the United States is of secondary concern.)



Other United States officials agree, and warn that bin Laden has given financial backing to anti-government groups in Egypt (where he has underwritten some of the activities of the Gama'a al-Islamiya and al-Jihad), Algeria, Yemen, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, and the Philippines. He has supported Islamic fighters not only in Afghanistan but also in Chechnya, Kosovo, Kashmir, Bosnia, and Tajikistan. But even though these groups may enjoy his patronage, he does not control them, and they are everything that his own organization is not: they are well structured, and most have long histories and specific (and often legitimate) complaints and concerns.

In May of 1996, under pressure from the United States and Saudi Arabia, the Sudanese government asked bin Laden to leave, and he returned to Afghanistan permanently, accompanied by two military-transport planes carrying some of his wealth, more than a hundred of his Afghan Arab fighters, and his four wives. Between two and three thousand of his other loyalists fanned out into Europe and across East Africa. "It was like sending Lenin back to Russia," an American diplomat said to me. "At least in the Sudan we could indirectly monitor some of his activities."

When bin Laden arrived in Afghanistan, the government that had eventually assumed power after the departure of the Soviets was being besieged by a fundamentalist student faction known as the Taliban. Its leader was Mullah Muhammad Omar, who, like bin Laden, had fought in the jihad. The two men had a similar ideology and complementary needs: bin Laden needed refuge, and the fledgling Taliban needed cash. Bin Laden gave the mullah an initial payment of three million dollars for the cause, and the Taliban was able to capture the key center of Jalalabad in September of 1996. Ten days later, the capital, Kabul, fell. And, sometime after that, according to United States officials, bin Laden, through the marriage of one of his daughters, became Mullah Omar's father-in-law.

"I'm getting esophagus notes with a bouquet of red and white blood cells and a bitter spinal-cord aftertaste."

THE American war against bin Laden has affected United States policy throughout much of the Islamic world, particularly in South Asia and the Middle East. Memorably, on August 20, 1998, the Pakistani Army's chief of staff, General Jehangir Karamat, was playing host in Islamabad to his American counterpart, General Joseph Ralston, the vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Around ten o'clock in the evening, as the two men were having dinner, Ralston looked up from his chicken tikka, checked his watch, and informed his host that in ten minutes some sixty Tomahawk cruise missiles would be entering Pakistan's airspace. Their destination, he said, was Afghanistan, where bin Laden was believed to be operating four training camps. General Karamat was stunned, and appalled.

"It was a 'This is happening as we speak' kind of conversation," an American intelligence official told me. "Ralston was there, on the ground, to make absolutely certain that when the missiles flew across Pakistan's radar screen they would not be misconstrued as coming from India and, as a consequence, be shot down." The intelligence official paused for a moment, and then said, "This is one hell of a way to treat our friends."

By the following day, General Karamat's anger—and that of the government he served—had turned to rage. A number of the Tomahawks either had been poorly targeted or had not fallen where they were aimed. Two of the four training camps that were hit and destroyed, in the Zhawar Kili area of Afghanistan's Paktia province, were facilities of Pakistan's own intelligence agency, the Inter-Services Intelligence, or I.S.I. According to a highly placed official, five I.S.I. officers and some twenty trainees were killed. The government of Pakistan was not only furious but embarrassed, because it had not been taken into Washington's confidence. Why had there been only ten minutes' notice? And why had General Karamat been notified, instead of the Prime Minister?

Pakistan wasn't our only affronted ally. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority—indeed, much of the Islamic world—expressed dismay. The United States had reason to be embarrassed as well. For, despite President Clinton's claim, in a televised address a few hours after the missile strikes, that a "gathering of key terrorist leaders" had been expected to take place at one of the target sites, bin Laden and his top lieutenants were more than a hundred miles away when the missiles struck. The meeting that Clinton referred to had occurred a month earlier, in Jalalabad.

The United States had expended seventy-nine million dollars on satellite-guided cruise missiles to destroy just thousands of dollars' worth of obstacle courses, field barracks, and tents. Only one of the six facilities struck was a bin Laden training camp. "It was all rather Biblical," a former intelligence official told me at the time. "The President was very specific: he wanted two targets, for the two embassies that were bombed." (The second target was the al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant, in Sudan, which the Administration claimed was used by bin Laden in either the manufacture or the distribution of chemical weapons. The Administration retreated from this theory last May, when, in refusing to answer a lawsuit, it released the frozen assets of the plant's owner.) Of the missile attacks, the former intelligence official asked, "Was it an intelligence failure or a policy failure? Or both?"

In the following year, there were approximately seventy temporary closings of American embassies and consulates after the C.I.A. warned that bin Laden appeared to be in the "advanced stages" of operational plans for another strike against an American facility abroad. But the agency conceded that it lacked precise information on where he might strike, or when. In a sense, bin Laden did not need to act; for, even without another bombing, he was holding the United States government hostage.

BEFORE Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was deposed, in a military coup last October, one of his key officials said to me, "I think what the Americans are really trying to say to us is

'Why don't you do our dirty work—get bin Laden and deliver him or, preferably, eliminate him?' We've told the Americans, 'Provide the Taliban with evidence, and let them try bin Laden there.' "

The Taliban has offered to do just that, once it receives evidence from the United States, but Washington does not take the offer seriously. ("Disingenuous, even laughable" is the way one United States official described it to me.) More recently, as the Taliban scrambled to avert sweeping financial and commercial sanctions imposed by the United Nations at the insistence of Washington, the Taliban's leaders floated a proposal that a panel of Islamic judges be convened in Afghanistan to determine bin Laden's fate—presumably to decide whether to extradite him to a third country for trial or to exonerate him. United States officials were divided on whether the Taliban was attempting to find a face-saving way to expel bin Laden or was merely playing for time; the Clinton Administration rejected the proposal peremptorily. The United States was equally perplexed by a letter allegedly written by bin Laden to Mullah Omar—and leaked by the Taliban's official press on October 29th—in which bin Laden offered to leave Afghanistan in exchange for a guarantee that his new location would be known to only two Taliban officials, including his son-in-law.

As I thought about what the other options might be, I remembered something else that the Pakistani official had said to me: "Quite honestly, what would Pakistan gain by going into Afghanistan and snatching bin Laden for you? We are the most heavily sanctioned United States ally. We helped you capture Ramzi Yousef"—the convicted mastermind of the World Trade Center bombing in New York. "We helped you capture Mir Amal Kansi"—he has been sentenced to death for the murder of two C.I.A. employees outside the agency's headquarters in 1993—"and all we got were thank-you notes. You lobbed missiles across our territory with no advance warning! You humiliated our government! You killed Pakistani intelligence officers! And then you come to us and say, 'It's your problem. You've got to get Osama bin Laden for us.' "

Saudi Arabia, for its part, continues to permit American troops to billet in the country, but it has prohibited them from conducting air strikes against Iraq. And, despite the American presence—or, perhaps, because of it—the kingdom's princes and foundations and wealthy businessmen, who include a number of bin Laden's friends, remain the leading benefactors of many of the world's militant Islamist groups. Thus, in a barely disguised attempt *not* to further antagonize bin Laden and his followers, the royal family has not allowed the F.B.I. to interrogate any of the suspects allegedly involved in the 1995 and 1996 bombings of United States military installations in Riyadh and Dhahran, and in both cases it abruptly cut short any inquiry into the broader dimensions of the bombings. More recently, the House of Saud has refused to permit United States investigators to interrogate one of bin Laden's key financial aides—Sidi Tayyib, a man of some influence, whom Saudi intelligence officials either have arrested (at the strong urging of Washington) or have lured into changing sides. But the Saudis, following their own investigation, bluntly told their C.I.A. counterparts that there was no basis for treating Tayyib "like a criminal." Tayyib, who is married to one of bin Laden's nieces, probably knows as much as anyone else about bin Laden's intricate financial empire.

As bin Laden's international image and stature increase—along with his support, both ideological and financial, among some of the kingdom's élite and the élites of other states in the Persian Gulf—any Saudi hopes of quietly resolving its bin Laden problem by force become less tenable. And each time the Clinton Administration raises the stakes, and further enhances bin Laden's prominence, more and more disaffected Saudis flock to join the kingdom's militant Islamist underground, of which bin Laden remains a central part. That is one of the most worrisome consequences of America's obsession with one man.

For twenty years, Osama bin Laden has refashioned himself with extraordinary dexterity and skill. Now the House of Saud, ever fearful of the Islamist challenge to its throne, appears intent on a transformation of its own—to turn what has been an often complex battle of wills between the Saudi royal family and its errant son into a far simpler conflict, one that pits bin Laden and his followers against the United States. ♦

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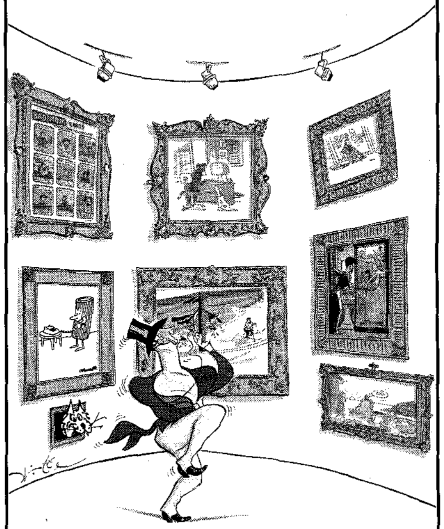

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HOMEWORK: A PARENT'S GUIDE

BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

MID-YEAR *Parent-Teacher Conferences:* Explain to child's teachers that you and your spouse declined all social invitations during the previous semester, including a state dinner at the White House, owing to amount of child's homework. Effect may be enhanced by blubbering, twitching, fidgeting with metal balls, etc. Suppress impulse to perform act of aggravated violence on fellow-parent who counters that his child is insufficiently "challenged" by current homework load. (Note: Recent juries have demonstrated marked reluctance to convict in such cases.)

ISTVAN BANYAI

- *The Appeal:* In event teacher does not appear to care that you are staying up until eleven-thirty every night to help child with report on Gross Domestic Product of Guatemala, you may discuss your "issues" (previously called "rage") with the school principal. This will result in an expression of sympathy, and an increase in the workload to 12:30 A.M. In extremis, drop hint to school principal that you are contemplating "significant" gesture to principal's "discretionary fund" (code for principal's summer "cottage"), but that you lack the proper time in the evening to "judiciously" oversee liquidation of the relevant equities, bonds, real-estate properties, etc.

- *Math:* Parents will find that the current "new" math bears no resemblance to the one of their own day, or, indeed, to any math. Ptolemy and Euclid would not recognize it. The multiplication table, for instance, has been replaced by a system whereby the digits of the right hand are interlaced with the toes of the left while the child hops backward in three-two time. (Chicago Math.) Variants include the Milwaukee Math, in which whole numbers (that is, numbers not followed by dots and more numbers) are expressed by binary burping, and the San Francisco Math, which employs Grape-Nuts and an algorithm based on the number of people currently leaping off the Golden Gate Bridge each month. These advances have rendered the normally capable parent incapable of calculating how many apples Jerome will be left with if he gives half to Mary, eats two and deposits the remaining number in an offshore account in the Cayman Islands. Fathers today find it increasingly useful to advise, "Go ask Mom; she really knows this stuff." (Note: You will be expected to be conversant with the metric system. Useful tips: One metre is "a squidge" more than the traditional yard. A hundred millimetres equals an extra-length cigarette, while a "litre" bottle of expensive French fizzy water is "more or less" one quart.)

- *The Phone Call:* Each night just as dinner is on the table, child will announce that he must telephone Georgia or Joseph to get the assignment for tomorrow, despite your tantrums of the previous four evenings over the absolute necessity of writing down the assignment in class. As a rule, Georgia or Joseph's phone will be busy for not less than one and a quarter hours, prompting rancorous parental running commentary. (Warning: Late-night calls to the teacher to find out the assignment are generally considered unwise, as the parent is by now in a state of acute emotional derangement and is therefore apt to "download" on the subject of homework. This will result in an increase in the daily load to 1:30 A.M.)

- *The Knapsack:* The current fashion is for child to carry a knapsack weighing no less than 3.2 times body weight (gross tonnage). This includes such items as are deemed essential by today's students, such as a hundredweight of Pokémon cards, hair scrunchies mixed with jelly beans, spare limbs from Barbie dolls, rotting fruit matter from the previous term, and extra ammunition clips. Net tonnage is the amount—expressed in long tons—of materials directly related to education, such as books, binders, and a minimum of three dozen mechanical pencils not containing leads. Care should be exercised while assisting child with harnessing of knapsack so as to avoid slipped disks and rotator-cuff injuries necessitating surgery. Nightly commencement of homework process (see tab A: "Getting To 'Okay, *Okay*'") will involve ten minutes of rummaging in knapsack for "the" pen, despite parental proffer of any number of alternative pens. Length of time necessary to locate pen generally corresponds to time remaining in current episode of "Dawson's Creek."

- *The Science Project:* No phrase strikes more terror into the heart of a parent today than "Science Project." Notwithstanding, a few weeks into the start of term your spouse will cheerfully announce to you—in child's presence, so as to preclude any protest on your part—the "wonderful" news that your child has selected you, specifically, to be his "partner" in the aforementioned exercise. (Refrain from stabbing spouse with fork under the table; there will be plenty of time in which to express your rage, betrayal, and other emotions.) You are now expected to devote all your "free" time over the next six weeks to devising a miniature version of the particle accelerator at CERN, in Switzerland, a home video explaining string theory using cooked spaghetti, or erecting a model of the human genome using 3.4 trillion Styrofoam balls (available at Wal-Mart). Unfortunately, the days are past when science projects could without embarrassment consist of store-bought ant farms (minus ants); hastily drawn cardboard charts showing how fast ice melts when immersed in a mixture of five parts gin, one part vermouth; a model of Sputnik using a Ping-Pong ball and two toothpicks; or a malodorous dish of dead tadpoles proving scientifically once and for all that amphibians cannot be left indefinitely on a hot radiator. In extremis, a project can be built around parent's recent hospitalization for exhaustion. ◆

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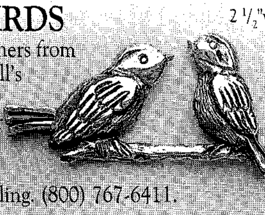

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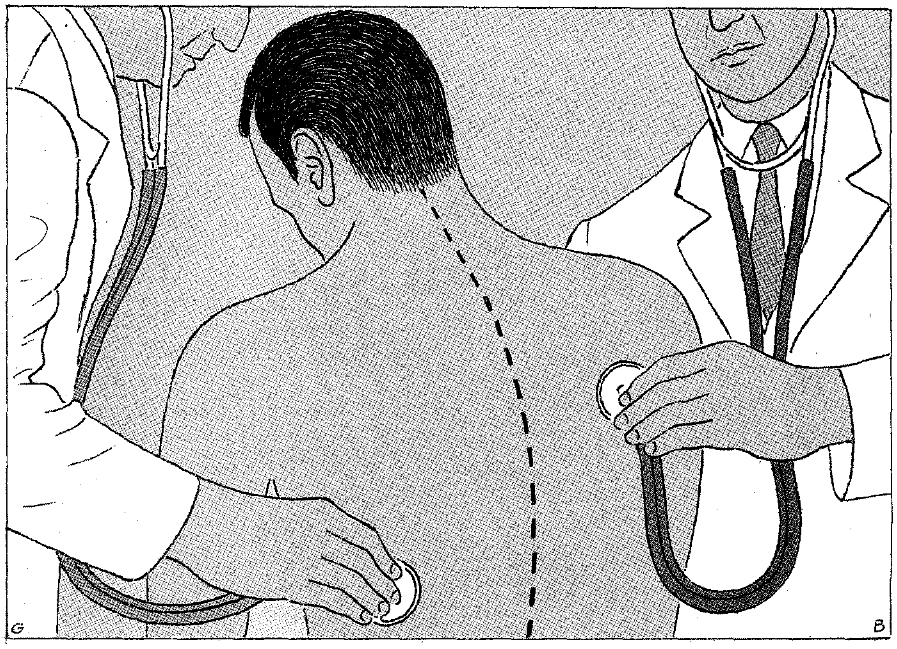
ANNALS OF MEDICINE

SECOND OPINION

How does a doctor tell a gravely ill man that another doctor's advice may kill him?

BY JEROME GROOPMAN



GUY BILLOUT

ALEX ORKIN, a thirty-eight-year-old physicist at a university in New York, was told by his doctor that he had less than six months to live unless he underwent a bone-marrow transplant. He called on me for a second opinion, and one cold day in February, 1994, he arrived at my office in Boston. He was a short, stocky man, with receding black hair, a broad nose, and darting eyes behind thick glasses. A couple of months earlier, at a faculty Christmas party, he had felt dizzy and nearly fainted. He had been exhausted for several months and assumed it was the long hours at work and the rigors of parenthood—he had two young children. But when a blood test revealed that he had severe anemia his doctor sent him to a specialist.

Dr. Frank Hochman, a senior hematologist at a medical center in New York, had performed an extensive evaluation of him. I'd met Frank at scientific meetings, and knew that he was a distinguished clinician and researcher, who led the marrow-transplant program at his hospital. (For reasons of confidentiality, I've changed names and identifying details.) He had found that Alex Orkin's marrow was largely depleted of cells, extensively scarred, and, evidently, incapable of producing sufficient blood. He had been unable to arrive at a definitive diagnosis, but he recommended that Orkin receive a bone-marrow transplant, despite the fact that no compatible donor had been found. It was an extremely aggressive and risky form of treatment; still, Hochman believed that not to pursue it would be even more dangerous. Orkin, a man whose training and temperament ill suited him to uncertainty, decided to get a second opinion.

Second opinions are common in cases like Orkin's, where the illness is serious and the diagnosis is uncertain. Orkin had a life-threatening condition, and the treatment he faced would itself be life-threatening. But seeking a second opinion can be awkward, for both the patient and the doctors. The patient sometimes worries that he will insult or alienate his primary doctor—that the doctor might abandon him out of pique.

For the doctor who is being second-guessed, there is the issue of pride: a second opinion tacitly highlights your limits and your fallibility. And when you're the one giving the second opinion all these issues come to the fore. You're evaluating a patient, but you're also, inevitably and uncomfortably, evaluating a colleague.

ORKIN had brought his medical files with him to Boston, and I looked through them. "Marrow failure state—myelodysplasia? aplastic anemia?" Hochman had written in his notes. He was uncertain why the marrow had failed, but myelodysplasia is a frequent cause. In myelodysplasia, damaged marrow cells appear distorted in size and shape. ("Dysplasia" is from the Greek for "distorted form," and "myelo" refers to marrow.) The condition can be caused by toxic chemicals, drugs, or radiation, any of which can damage the cells' DNA and so deform their appearance. In many cases, myelodysplasia evolves into acute leukemia. Aplastic anemia is a disorder in which the marrow appears nearly empty, with very few cells to be seen. ("Aplastic" is from the Greek for "without form.") Patients with this condition seldom live long, because their marrow produces so little blood. Aplastic anemia can result from the same factors that produce myelodysplasia—chemicals, drugs, and radiation—and also from certain viruses and autoimmune diseases, such as lupus.

But which condition did Orkin have? The sparse numbers of marrow cells, Hochman wrote, could signal aplastic anemia; the changes in their appearance suggested myelodysplasia. There were too few cells in Hochman's biopsy to analyze for DNA damage, which, if present, might have supported the latter diagnosis. Other tests were inconclusive.

Under Hochman's care, Alex Orkin received transfusions of red blood cells to help treat his anemia and transfusions of platelets to prevent bleeding. A course of treatment with immunosuppressive drugs, which was sometimes effective in aplastic anemia, didn't seem to help.

If a patient is less than forty years old and his or her marrow has failed because of myelodysplasia or aplastic anemia, a bone-marrow transplant is the best chance of a cure. But Alex Orkin had no related donors, and no good matches had turned up on the national registry of donors. So Dr. Hochman had recommended that he undergo an unmatched transplant. As in a standard transplant, all of the marrow cells would be destroyed by high doses of chemotherapy and radiation. Then a donor's stem cells—cells that have the ability to form the various cellular components of blood—would be infused; they would repopulate the marrow cavity and start producing red cells, white cells, and platelets. Unfortunately, the white cells produced by an unmatched donor would perceive their host as foreign and start to attack Orkin's own tissues. He could expect his liver and bowel and skin to be ravaged. Many patients die from the condition—known as graft-versus-host disease—and most of those who survive are permanently debilitated.

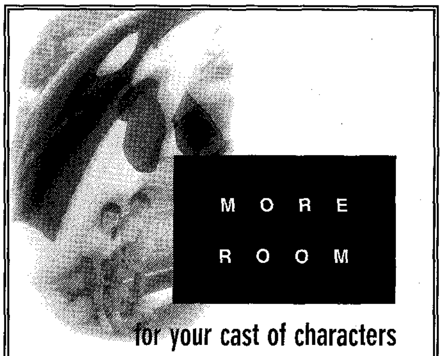
Heavy sheets of freezing rain began to fall as Alex Orkin and I reviewed his medical history. Orkin spoke in a dry, professorial tone, as if his way of dealing with his condition were to turn himself into a research paper. Still, when he told me of the six-month prognosis that Frank Hochman had given him, he clasped his hands tightly to arrest a growing tremor.

Alex Orkin was born in Brooklyn to a middle-class family. Nobody in his family had suffered from a blood disease. Orkin was a scientist, but the work he did was theoretical, not experimental, and he knew of no exposure to radiation or chemicals or pathogens that could have injured his marrow.

I recall him listing his risk factors in a detached, expressionless voice; he'd obviously gone through this several times before. "I don't use illicit drugs," he said. "I have no tolerance for alcohol. I never had a venereal disease. My wife, Sandra, and I met in college—she's an electrical engineer. I've been monogamous ever since."

Occasionally, autoimmune diseases, like lupus, can suppress the marrow. But Orkin had never had any signs of such a disease—arthritis, urinary problems, skin rashes, visual difficulties. He did have some low-back strain from lifting his children.

"You didn't take medications like Butazolidin for the strain, did you?" I asked. Butazolidin is a painkiller and



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anti-inflammatory that has been associated with aplastic anemia.

"Just Tylenol," he said.

Was he certain?

"Of course I'm certain," he said, gazing at me stonily. "I have a near-photographic memory." Then he handed me a computer printout he'd prepared for me. At the top of the page was "December 17, 1993," the date of the faculty Christmas party at which he first fell ill. Dr. Hochman's office address and telephone and fax numbers followed. Then there was a graph with three colored lines, one for red blood cells, one for white blood cells, and the third for platelets. It charted their levels over the weeks since the party.

Alex Orkin's physical examination, except for the pallor from his anemia, was normal. While he dressed, I took the slides of the bone-marrow biopsy done in New York to the microscope room next to the clinic.

I began the examination of the marrow biopsy under low magnification. Instead of a rich field of growing cells amid nourishing fat, which you see in healthy marrow, it looked like a desert landscape. Large, desolate tracts extended from the rough borders of bone. Several wide bridges of scar tissue crossed these tracts. I increased the magnification to search for signs of life, and slowly marched down the empty tracts. Finally, I found a few groups of immature marrow cells, clustered along deposits of fat, like bands of desperate nomads clinging to drying oases.

I wasn't quite sure what to make of what I saw—it didn't seem to fit with either diagnosis—and so I took the slides to Ned Waterman, the pathologist at my hospital who specialized in blood diseases. Waterman carefully studied the biopsy, shifting from low to high magnification, as I had done. Finally, he said, "It's not myelodysplasia and it's not aplastic anemia." He explained that the few marrow cells he'd found lacked the characteristic distortions of myelodysplasia, and he doubted it was aplastic anemia because of another feature he'd noticed. "Too many nests of marrow cells around the fat deposits," he said. "My best guess is that something *outside* the marrow's stem cells is suppressing this man's capacity to produce blood. Intrinsically, I believe his marrow cells may be healthy."

I WALKED slowly back to the hematology clinic, feeling unsettled. The diagnostic reasoning in New York had been complete, but there was a critical difference of opinion between Hochman and me, and it was based upon a subjective interpretation of the same marrow biopsy.

"I've reviewed your biopsy with Dr. Waterman," I told Orkin. "We're seeing marrow failure. But we don't believe it shows myelodysplasia *or* aplastic anemia."

"Believe?" he replied. "Or know?"

"Diagnostic tests like the bone-marrow biopsy are inexact," I said. "They're open to varying interpretations."

This sort of uncertainty didn't sit well with him, as I recall. "How inexact?" he pressed. "Is the test 'open to interpretation' on the order of one per cent or ten per cent or fifty per cent?"

Alex Orkin was a hard scientist. He solved problems using sharp, quantitative information. But here numbers weren't easy to come by. "It's difficult to say just how inexact," I said, aware that the words sounded evasive. "So we look to other tests to refine the diagnosis. But those couldn't be done, because you had a 'dry tap.'" That is, when Hochman's team drilled into Orkin's pelvic bone they hadn't been able to extract any fluid, or aspirate, which normally contains a whole range of marrow cells. "We should try again and repeat the aspirate."

"There aren't any other tests you can do?"

Waterman and I had discussed this question. Confirming his hypothesis would require special experiments—not something to be undertaken lightly. Such experiments are time-consuming and expensive, requiring researchers to divert their attention from ongoing work. All the same, we'd already decided to design a small study. As Orkin knew, the biology of bone-marrow growth was a major research focus in my laboratory; if we could collect enough cells, we'd try to grow them in a petri dish and experiment on them. "It's a long shot, but it might give us insights we don't have from standard tests."

"I like that—an experiment," Alex Orkin replied, his face brightening for the first time. And he asked how long it would take.

Cultures of marrow are usually assessed at twenty-one days. So, conservatively, we would have data in less than a month. I warned him, though, that research assays were even less exact than clinical tests.

"And in the meantime?"

"Continue the transfusions for your anemia and your low platelets. Your white count is low, and you're at risk for major infection. I would begin injections of G-CSF. It's a protein that might

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boost your white-blood-cell count."

"That's it?"

"For now, yes."

Orkin pointed out that my recommendation contradicted Hochman's. Hochman had scheduled Orkin for chemotherapy next week, to be followed by an unmatched transplant.

"A third opinion might be helpful," I said.

Alex Orkin shook his head. Both Dr. Hochman and I were experts; he didn't see the point in getting another subjective interpretation of the same data.

Then I brought up an issue that had been bothering me. "Even if we confirm one of Dr. Hochman's diagnoses," I said, "I disagree with the statement that you have less than six months to live. No one can say that, because of the inherent variability in how diseases behave. There is a distribution of outcomes of any illness. Most patients with a certain type of brain tumor live six to nine months. I've seen patients with it live more than two years. Sure, living two years is several standard deviations from the mean—some small percentage of cases. But it's not *zero*. What's false is to say that you have only some arbitrary time to live."

Orkin looked away. He was a theoretical physicist, trained to view variability and inexactness as enemies. "It does make a difference to hear that," he finally said. Then he asked me to explain the experiment I had in mind.

We would try to extract a sample of his marrow cells, isolate them from whatever poisons or antagonists might be present in his body, and see how those cells grew. If the stem cells themselves were healthy, then the most obvious culprit would be some component of his immune system: either specially targeted proteins, the so-called antibodies, or a type of white blood cell, the lymphocytes. We could investigate these possibilities by adding either his antibodies or his lymphocytes to cultures of growing marrow cells from a healthy donor. That way, we could get more evidence about whether antibodies or lymphocytes in his system were hostile to marrow cells.

Orkin smiled. He saw a checkerboard of possibilities, he said, with two variables in play, his antibodies and his lymphocytes. "How might growing my marrow show your interpretation to be incorrect—and Dr. Hochman's to be right?" he asked.

"There'd be some evidence for that if your stem cells, freed in the culture dish from your immune cells and antibodies, still didn't grow properly." It wouldn't be proof, of course; as I explained, there'd still be the possibility that an antibody was at work, one whose effects could not be diluted by the isolation procedure.

"So it's inexact," he observed. "Like most of medicine."

I said I would show the biopsy to my colleagues and ask their opinion—a so-called "curbside consult." Then I'd call Dr. Hochman and discuss my thinking with him. I hoped there might be a meeting of the minds, that Frank Hochman would tell me of something I'd missed, or vice versa.

"Ready for another marrow biopsy?" I asked.

ALEX ORKIN lay on his abdomen. His head, turned to the side, rested on a thin pillow.

"First, the iodine," I said. I always narrate what I'm doing in these procedures. I applied the sterilizing solution to the posterior crest of his pelvis, which would be the entry point for the large-bore trocar. "I'm going to anesthetize the area with lidocaine, like at the dentist. It's a bee sting."

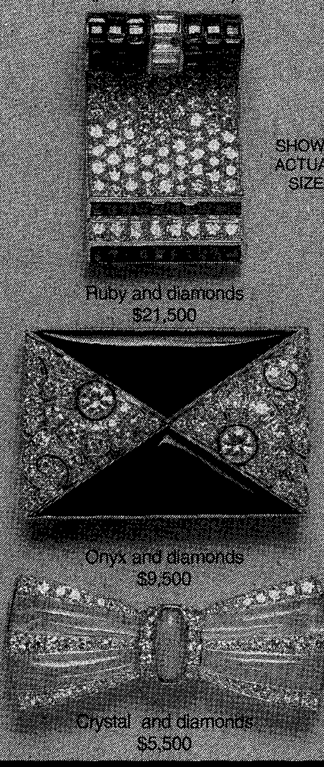
The needle was twenty-four-gauge, very thin, and drew only a single drop of blood. I raised a small mound under the skin, and then rubbed it so the anesthetic was dispersed into the tissue. I then inserted the needle deeper, all the while releasing anesthetic, until it hit the fibrous sheath covering the pelvis. I injected a large amount of lidocaine into the sheath.

"Let's wait a few minutes for the anesthetic to work," I said. "Tell me more about what you're currently working on."

Orkin told me that he was part of a team of physicists trying to increase the speed of computing. He worked on the theoretical side, creating models for the flow of electrons in a variety of microchip materials and designs, which other people would assemble and test.

"Any successes?" I asked.

"Some encouraging results, but still preliminary. I think we're on the right track, but it needs to be significantly better to be competitive, and we're far from that." He explained that he would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"The New Yorker of the 8–13 set" -Ms.

prefer to work in purely theoretical physics, continuing his doctoral project on the behavior of subatomic particles. But he had to compromise. His current research topic was considered "hot," he said; he had to "follow the money" to be sure of support.

I took the trocar and placed a thin metal rod inside it. The rod would displace connective and fatty tissue as the knifelike tip of the trocar cut from the skin to the bone. I pressed downward and the bevelled edge of the trocar sliced straight through the flesh to the sheath of the bone. Alex Orkin did not move or cry out.

"Now I'm going to bore the trocar in and aspirate out the marrow. Women say the sensation is like menstrual cramps, a deep ache in the pelvis."

I pushed hard and felt a snap as the thick bone gave. I pushed farther, and, feeling no resistance, was sure that I was inside. I removed the inner rod of the trocar and attached a large syringe to the handle. I pulled on its plunger.

A trickle of viscous marrow slowly crept into the bottom of the syringe. I let the syringe's plunger down halfway, and then pulled upward again, maximizing the force of the vacuum. Fragments of the inner lattice of the bone marrow, called spicules, flew up into the syringe.

"We've got some good marrow," I said.

"I felt that," Orkin said wanly.

"Sorry. It's impossible to anesthetize inside the bone."

I reinserted the thin metal rod into the trocar and pushed still deeper into the cavity. Beads of perspiration trickled down Orkin's face onto the pillow. "We're almost done," I said. "Just the biopsy and then the trocar comes out."

"I now have more sympathy for menstrual cramps," he said.

I removed the rod and twisted the open trocar, feeling the inner lattice grate along the sharp edge of the instrument. I twisted again, and then quickly pulled the trocar out. Blood welled from the hole the instrument had made in Orkin's skin, and I quickly applied a pressure bandage.

"Take slow, deep breaths," I told Orkin. Sweat now streamed down his cheeks.

I teased out a core of marrow from inside the trocar. It looked like a calcified worm. This was the biopsy. Part of it would be placed in fixative, and the rest put in a sterile saline solution for special tests to be done by Ned Waterman.

Alex Orkin was still breathing hard. The procedure always hurts.

"I've had eight marrows done on myself," I told him.

"Into S & M?" he asked weakly.

"No, but when I was a research fellow in the lab we would aspirate marrow from each other for experiments. Now we pay donors."

"How much do they get?"

The going rate was seventy-five dollars, I told him.

"Times must be very hard in Boston," he said. "You couldn't get away so cheap in New York."

THREE days later, Ned Waterman and I again sat at the microscope. Our conclusion was the same: it was marrow failure, but it didn't look like myelodysplasia or aplastic anemia. The DNA studies on the aspirated marrow cells would take more time. I called Hochman.

"Are you coming to the stem-cell meeting next week?" he asked. "I'd like to take you down the mountain with me." The year before, at a winter meeting on hematology research held at a ski resort, Hochman and I had shared a chairlift. When we reached the top, he challenged me to follow him down his favorite double-black-diamond expert trail. It was far beyond my abilities, and I went for an easier run.

"I think I'll keep living as a coward, with intact limbs," I replied. Then I told him about Ned Waterman's assessment of Alex Orkin's biopsy and our opinion of the case.

"We'll have to agree to disagree," Frank said, polite but firm. "The senior man down here is as accomplished a pathologist as any. I've followed this patient now for nearly two months. The longer we delay, the riskier it gets. Professor Orkin needs definitive treatment, and he needs it now."

I asked if there was any progress on identifying compatible donors.

"We're going ahead with an unmatched transplant," Hochman said.

My stomach tightened. "What about a trial of growth factors to boost his blood counts, as a temporizing measure?" I asked. G-CSF, the white-cell growth factor, and erythropoietin, a red-cell growth factor, might increase his marrow production.

"If it's aplastic anemia, they don't work," Hochman said, his tone cool. "And if it's myelodysplasia G-CSF may spark full-blown leukemia. This isn't the time for 'temporizing measures.' I know the risks here—an unmatched transplant might succeed one out of four or five times, maybe less. And he'll have some form of chronic graft-versus-host disease if he survives. But I've seen countless cases of severe marrow failure in my years of practice. It's a bad dis-

SOON

Something is always arriving or fading,
Drifting down a stream or falling
From branches into a pool of shade:

A cluster of hazelnuts lying in the grass
Of a summer garden soon, very soon
Graces a platter of olives and cheese

And green figs ripening since noon,
As we dine with the beautiful couple
At our table, drinking to the light

Between them a year before they part,
Confused and sad and sure, very sure
They cannot live together anymore.

—PHILLIS LEVIN

ease. A fatal disease. As I like to tell my trainees, desperate diseases require desperate measures."

As he spoke, I recalled something that an attending physician once told me during my medical-student days. I had been on the wards at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center with Dr. Linda Lewis, a statuesque woman who was raised in rural West Virginia. One day on rounds, I presented a complex case to her. She repeated my physical examination and then suggested we retire to a conference room to discuss the patient. I admitted that I wasn't sure of the diagnosis. Dr. Lewis, who was among the most respected clinicians at the hospital, said she wasn't sure, either, and couldn't think of other tests likely to clarify the case. There was, she told me, an edict she abided by in situations like this: Don't just do something—stand there.

I chafed at the advice. It ran counter to my clinical training, which urged us to use the technologies we had at hand. Moreover, we understood that patients *wanted* us to act, that taking action in itself had a therapeutic effect. A passive doctor revealed his ignorance and risked undermining his credibility in the eyes of patients and their families. It took a while before I saw the wisdom of Dr. Lewis's recommendation.

"Frank, I'm going to advise Professor Orkin to wait," I said.

There was silence on the line.

I had no solid evidence that Hochman's advice was wrong. But the risks seemed too great.

"I'm seeing the patient today," Hochman said icily. "And I'll urge him to do what's needed."

ALEX ORKIN telephoned me later that afternoon with a barrage of questions: How could there be such disagreement about the same biopsy? What would I estimate as the probability that my analysis was wrong—one per cent, ten per cent, fifty per cent? What if the experiments in my laboratory were inconclusive—would that change my opinion? What if they suggested an intrinsic problem in the marrow stem cells—would I then agree with Dr. Hochman that he proceed with an unmatched transplant?

Sandra Orkin was also on the line. She mainly listened, only occasionally

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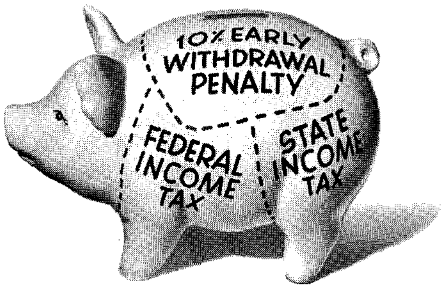

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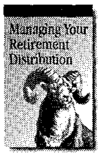

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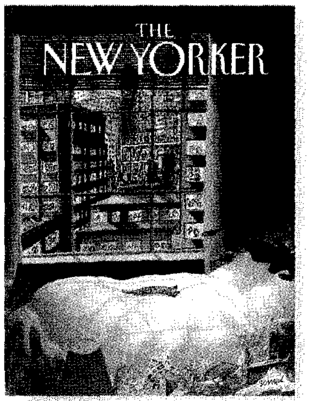

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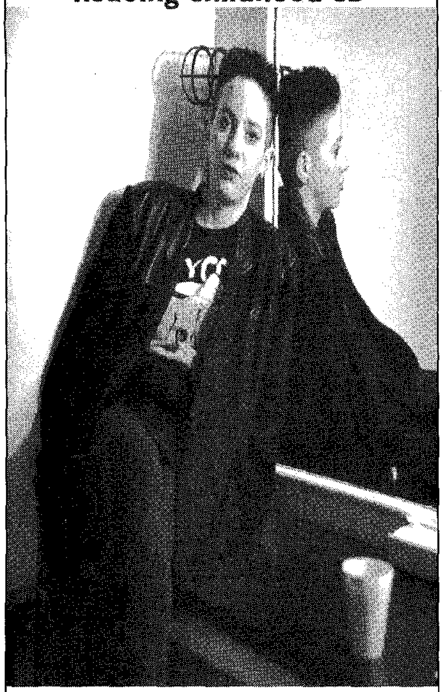

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adding a few words to extend her husband's questions.

I answered each of the questions as concretely as I could. In essence, though, there was one reply to them all: Intuition can weigh as heavily as raw data in clinical judgment.

"But we have to go one way or the other," Alex Orkin said.

Once again, I suggested that he seek a third opinion.

"I don't see this as a tie-breaker vote," he said. "And Dr. Hochman would direct me to someone of his philosophy, and you might refer me to someone of yours."

I told the Orkins that Ned Waterman was going to send the marrow slides to other pathologists.

"That could take weeks," Sandra Orkin said. "And Dr. Hochman told us we had no time to wait."

"But, honey, he also said, again, that I had less than six months to live," her husband told her.

I didn't say anything.

"And today," Orkin went on, "when I asked him how he calculated this—specifically, in my case—he said, 'I know.' He said *he* was the professor of hematology, and patients like me who keep questioning his every statement can see his curriculum vitae. I don't like statements like that. I am not going to accept his opinion as a fiat, based on his credentials or reputation. So I pushed him further, asking for a set of confidence limits around his estimate of my survival. He told me I was 'in denial.' I told Dr. Hochman I am painfully aware I have a life-threatening condition." Alex paused. "But then again I don't fully trust my thinking."

I WAITED several days for the Orkins' answer, and during that time the case stayed in the front of my mind. I kept trawling through Alex's medical history and tests, searching for some overlooked clue. I found nothing.

The call came late Friday morning. It was Sandra. "He's in the I.C.U.," she said.

I listened tensely.

"I brought him to the hospital just before midnight. He was delirious—ranting. I've never seen Alex confused before. It was awful."

Alex Orkin had a fever of a hundred and four degrees. Sandra said the doctors had diagnosed pneumonia; he'd been started on antibiotics, and was being given oxygen. "If he doesn't improve quickly, Dr. Hochman thinks he'll need a respirator."

For a patient in his condition, pneumonia was often fatal. Alex Orkin's white-blood-cell count was very low, his immune defenses minimal. Maybe I was the one who was in denial, heeding some cowardly inner voice saying, Wait, wait.

I reached Frank Hochman around noon. His voice had the hoarseness of someone who had spent a sleepless night. "The sepsis is high-grade," he told me. "We've got him on triple antibiotics."

I had little to say, except to ask to be kept informed.

"You call me," Hochman replied acidly. "My nurse is available to update you as needed." He added, "If we pull him through this, I'm going to push the Orkins hard to go immediately to transplant. It's madness to just sit and wait for the next catastrophe."

ALEX ORKIN was placed on a respirator at the end of that first day in the I.C.U. The pneumonia had blossomed in several lobes of his lung, and he wasn't able to sustain a satisfactory level of oxygen. Over the next week, his red-blood-cell and platelet counts plummeted, which is typical with systemic infection. He received several transfusions, but they hardly kept pace.

I called Dr. Hochman's office twice a day and spoke with his nurse, a pleasant older woman who knew what was happening to Orkin moment by moment. Eight days into the hospitalization, Frank Hochman paged me.

"We may lose him," he said. "We can't keep on top of the pneumonia."

"Should we try to boost his white cells with G-CSF? It may not work if it's aplastic anemia, and . . ."

"And trigger leukemia if it's myelodysplasia." Hochman finished my sentence.

"True. But the risk of triggering leukemia seems smaller than the risk of no white cells."

Frank Hochman was silent.

The risk of triggering leukemia, it seemed to me, was only theoretical. Sporadic cases of this had been reported, but they might have been accounted for by the natural evolution of myelodysplasia into acute leukemia. (As it happens, subsequent research has allayed the worry.) I wondered if Frank would be willing to change his mind. I had attended his presentations at hematology meetings, and he sometimes bristled at pointed questions. Finally, I said, "There's really little we can lose right now."

"O.K. I'll start it. At a high dose. If it has any chance of working, it'll be at a high dose. But if he develops acute leukemia it's on your head."

I remembered a case when I was a hematology-oncology fellow at U.C.L.A. in the late seventies. I was working at a clinic devoted to a particular variety of leukemia. An elderly farmhand who worked in the San Joaquin Valley was evaluated with low-grade fevers and skin nodules. I assumed that they were solid nests of leukemic cells within the skin, a common feature of the disorder, and didn't send him to a dermatologist for a biopsy. After a few weeks of chemotherapy, he developed a raging fever. The nodules turned out to harbor an unusual fungus. We treated him with anti-fungal drugs, but it was too late. He died of the infection. It was one of the most painful experiences I'd had as a doctor. Colleagues assured me that the patient "would have died anyway"; the fungus was often fatal, even with prompt treatment. But I never forgave myself. There was no question of neglect in Alex Orkin's case: he had been about as thoroughly examined as was medically possible. But Hochman's words made me question myself. It's on your head, he'd told me, and it was.

LATER that day, I opened the incubator in my lab and retrieved a stack of petri dishes. It was only fifteen days since we had aspirated the marrow from Alex Orkin and obtained a comparative specimen from a healthy donor. But I was desperate for any bit of data on his disease.

Each petri dish was filled with agar, a straw-colored gel. I examined the dishes "blind," meaning I didn't know which were holding Alex's cells and which the donor's. The dishes were identified only by coded numbers.

The sharp light of the microscope diffused through the thick agar, casting a hazy glow like a corona and illuminating clusters of translucent marrow cells. I studied some twenty dishes, systematically counting the numbers of clustered cells by quadrants. I jotted these numbers in columns on a sheet of lab paper. Yigong Chen, a researcher in my lab who was an expert in the biology of marrow growth, independently counted each dish.

"No difference," I concluded.

Chen agreed.

I returned the dishes to the incubator, and then removed a second stack. These, too, held marrow cells cultured in the agar matrix, but here Chen's technician had added quantities of serum containing antibodies either from Alex Orkin or from the healthy donor. Again we counted the cultures blind. There were roughly the same numbers in each. The antibodies didn't seem to make any difference.

I counted the third set of petri dishes, and then Chen did. In these, the technician had mixed the marrow cells with lymphocytes from Alex Orkin's blood or from the donor's.

Chen finished his cell count and turned to me excitedly. We'd both found that some of the dishes were nearly barren.

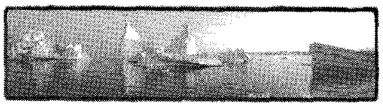
"Break the code now," I said. In a special file, the content of each dish was listed, together with its identifying numbers. "I'm not waiting a full twenty-one days."

We learned that the barren petri dishes were the ones where Alex Orkin's lymphocytes had been mixed with his own marrow cells, or with the donor's. Evidently, there were lymphocytes in Alex Orkin's system that inhibited the growth of both his marrow and the marrow of the donor. I couldn't rule out alternative explanations for what we'd seen, but at the very least we had reason to think that his stem cells might grow under the right conditions.

"There doesn't seem to be a major intrinsic abnormality in Alex's marrow cells," I told Sandra over the phone later that day. "They can grow, given the right environment."

"That gives me some hope," she replied, but she sounded drained. "I just keep thinking he's going to die, and I'll be alone with the kids."

FOR seven days, Alex Orkin's pneumonia raged. Then the G-CSF began to take effect. The white count slowly climbed to the level needed to combat bacteria, and, over the ensuing week, the infection started to abate. Alex was gradually weaned off the res-

THE ICE FINDERS

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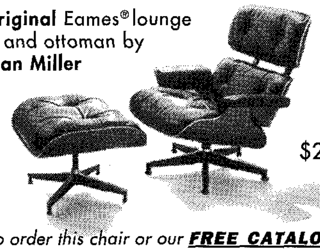
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pirator. After a month in the hospital, he had lost nearly thirty pounds and could not walk more than a few steps unassisted. Still, there was no sign of acute leukemia, and he was able to go home.

"I feel very strongly about continuing the G-CSF," I told Hochman, "given what he just went through, and the fact that it had some effect."

"We've been lucky so far," he said. "I'm concerned that long-term treatment will exhaust his marrow." His objection was that long-term G-CSF therapy, driving the fragile marrow stem cells to grow and mature into white blood cells, would deplete them. This theory was widely aired when growth factors like G-CSF first came into use, and yet there was little evidence that such "marrow fatigue" occurred.

"We found several closer donor matches," Hochman said, changing the subject.

"How close?"

"Three out of six."

This meant that half of the genetic determinants were in accord. Transplant was still a high risk. "I'd give him more time," I said. "I'm intrigued that his marrow cells grew so well in the lab, and that his counts improved on the G-CSF."

"Honestly, I think you're chasing rainbows," Hochman said.

I TELEPHONED the Orkins later that day. Sandra's voice was tremulous. Alex's pneumonia was a warning, Dr. Hochman had told her. "He says now is the time to go ahead with the transplant," she said.

"Then invite them. No one likes them, but every salad needs a little vinegar."

"But there is still no matched donor," I cautioned.

"He says to just do it, with a partial match, three out of six."

Alex had come near death and Sandra had been at his side. Now they were both panicked; they wanted to do something. "Let's step back and look at some of the data," I said. I mentioned the robust growth of his isolated marrow cells in my laboratory and the rise in his white cells on G-CSF. And, recently, the report that his aspirated marrow cells had no DNA abnormalities.

"Truthfully, we just don't know what to do, whom to believe," Sandra said in a quavering voice.

I heard from the Orkins later that week. "Dr. Hochman says I'm 'diddling around,' " Alex said. "And he said there has to be one chef in the kitchen."

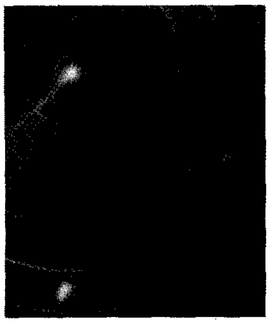
I said that Hochman was right about that.

"But I didn't like his reply when I asked again for his thinking about the wisdom of a transplant. He said that he has more experience with transplantation than you. When I reminded him that he had opposed the G-CSF, he answered that he still felt it was risky, that it might exhaust my marrow."

I realized that I was hearing what Alex Orkin had heard, not necessarily what Frank Hochman had said, but it held a kernel of truth. Hochman *was* more experienced with transplantation than I. On the other hand, his very expertise might have been affecting his judgment, since we all tend to fall back on what we know best when giving advice.

"I'm going to wait on the transplant and follow your lead," Alex Orkin said. "You are the chef in the kitchen. At least for now."

"HE'S going to die, you know," Frank Hochman said gruffly. He was bitter about the Orkins' decision. "They said they still wanted to see me, have him cared for through my office. But I find it difficult to attend to someone who rejects my advice." Hochman was an eminent man in his field; he had saved many hundreds of lives. And, it was clear, he genuinely believed that his patient would die because



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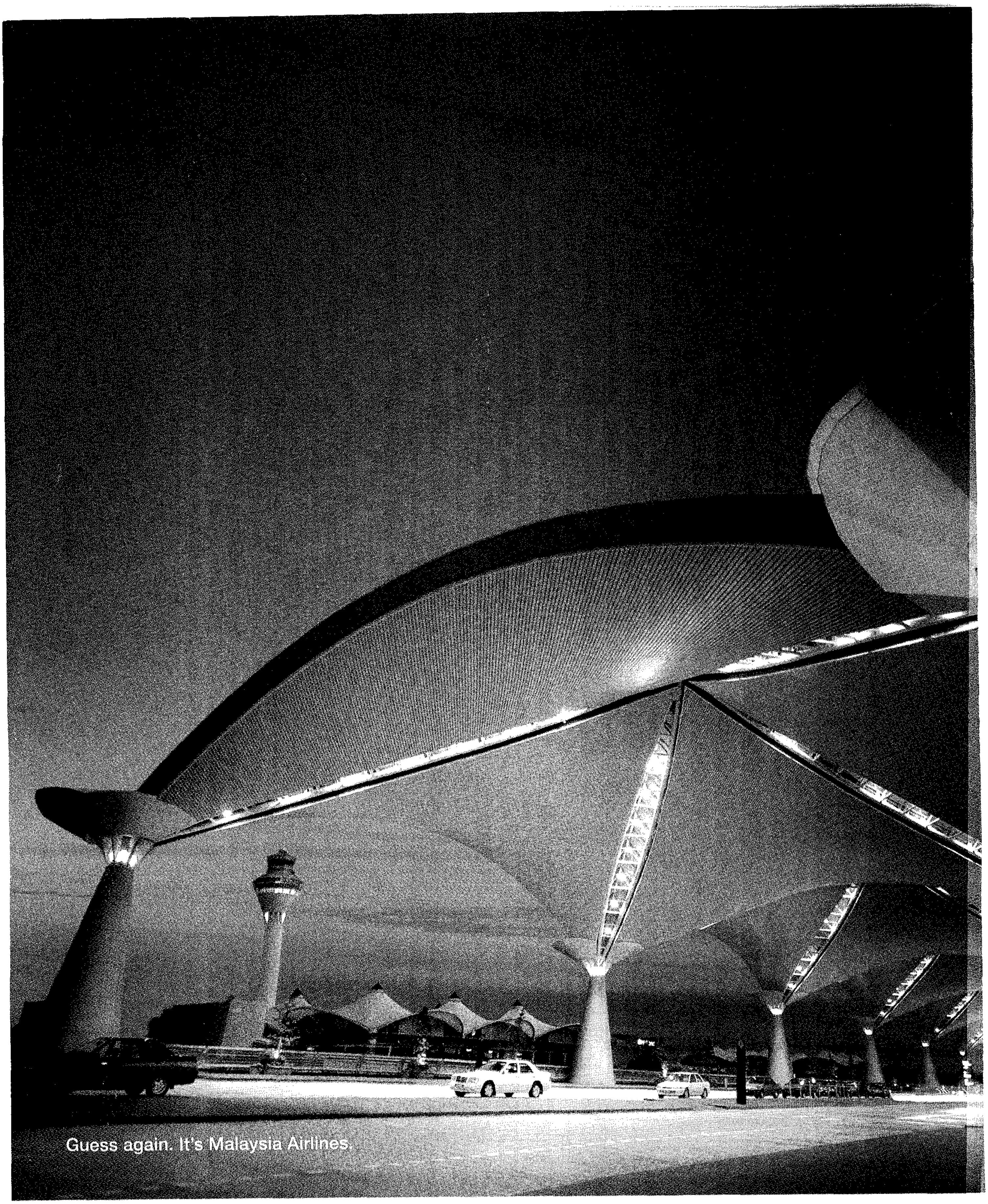

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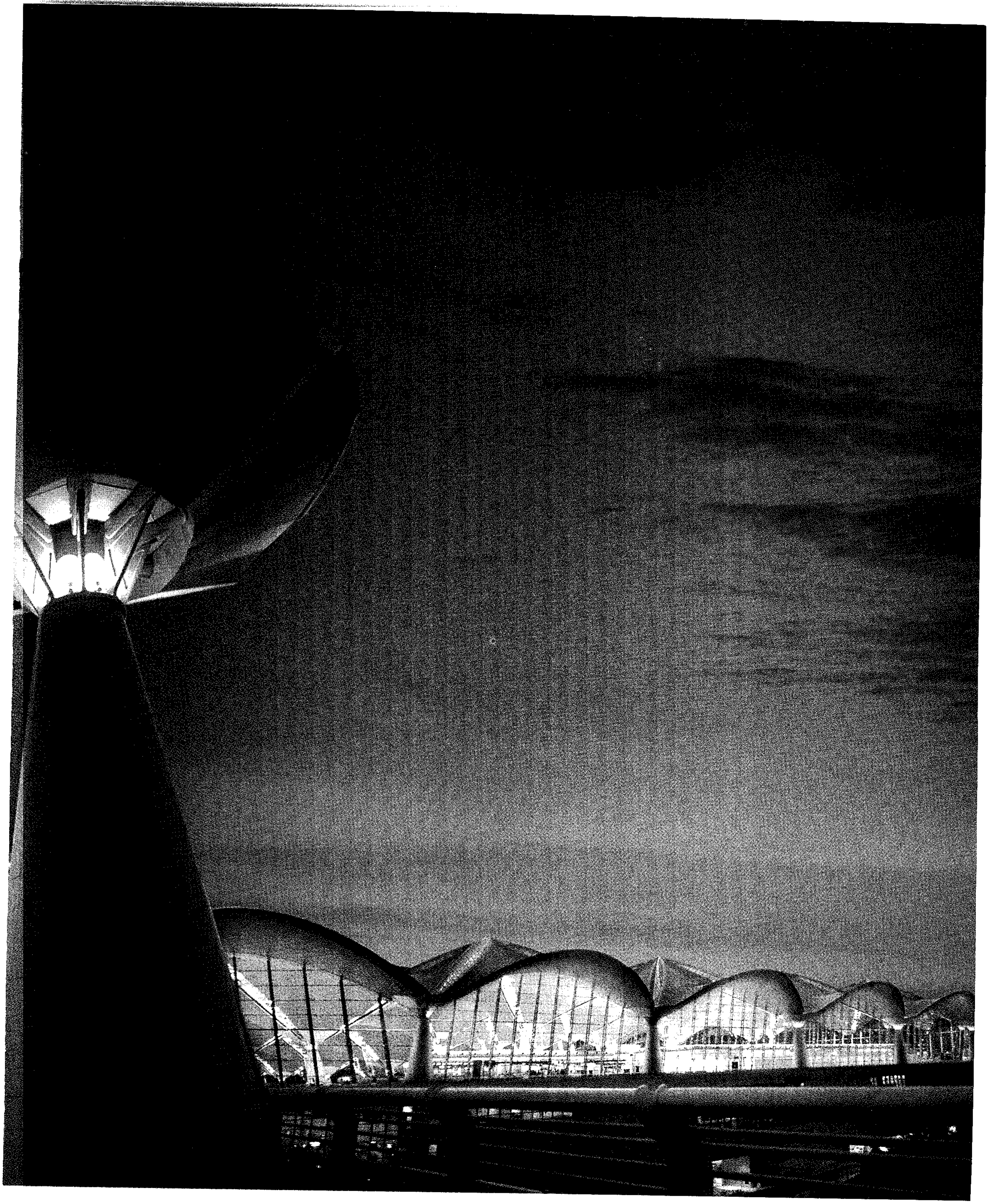

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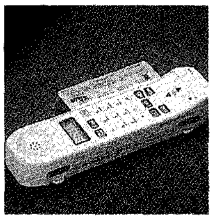

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I had dissuaded him from accepting the only course of treatment, however ravaging, that had a chance of extending his life.

I told Hochman that Alex Orkin would benefit from his expertise, that they had an established relationship. Finding a new doctor in New York would be disruptive. Besides, transplantation might emerge as the best option if a match was found.

We re-started the G-CSF to try to boost Alex Orkin's white-cell production, and added erythropoietin to try to do the same for his red cells. Each Monday and Thursday, Alex Orkin sent me a fax. It summarized his current symptoms and his cumulative doses of G-CSF and erythropoietin; it also included an updated graph of his blood counts. They were inching upward. He was still tired, and napped in the afternoon, but was slowly beginning to regain his energy. He had regained some weight, though his appetite was still poor and he had to force himself to eat. I received regular reports from Frank Hochman's office as well, including copies of the blood tests and physical examinations.

"I'd like to do another marrow biopsy, sometime early this fall," I said to Orkin. That would be the most direct way to see how his marrow was recovering.

When I next saw him, it was a cool day in early October, a brisk wind testing the autumn leaves. The Harvard medical area was dense with traffic and pedestrians.

Alex Orkin sat in the first row of chairs in the clinic waiting area. He was reading a document. A thick sheaf of papers was on his lap. He didn't look up until I greeted him by name.

"Oh, sorry," he said. "It's this new grant proposal I'm preparing." He explained that it was on subatomic particles. He had decided to work on what really interested him. It might take several submissions for the application to be funded—if it ever would be. But he figured it was worth the effort.

In the examination room, Orkin undressed. His color was good; he'd lost the anemic pallor he had before. He had regained some more weight. His lungs had not fully healed, but there were no other abnormal findings on physical exam. I prepared to take the biopsy.

"I haven't been looking forward to this," he said.

Now it was easy to obtain an aspirate. The thick juice flowed readily into the syringe.

"Any inflation in the price of healthy donor marrow?" Alex Orkin asked as he dressed after the procedure.

"No. This is Boston, very conservative and set in its ways."

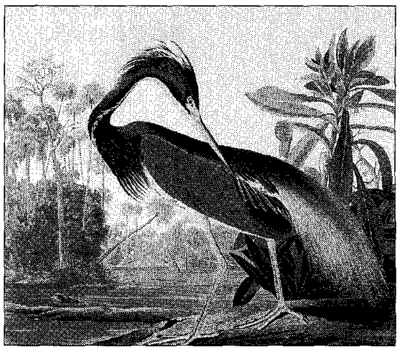
THREE days later, I sat in the pathology department with Ned Waterman as he surveyed the specimen under low power and then under high magnification. "Remarkable," he said. The wide, desolate tracts we'd seen before were now filled with streams of developing blood cells. "There's hardly even any scar left," Waterman added.

I left Waterman and called the Orkins with the news. Sandra began to cry.

"How did you know the right thing to do?" Alex Orkin asked, his voice high with elation.

The point, of course, was that I *didn't* know; Hochman and I were forced to make our decisions under conditions of uncertainty. This was medicine, not physics—it was a realm, often, of educated guesswork rather than arithmetical precision.

I still was not completely sanguine about Orkin's prospects. He may have had a reaction to some unknown virus that suppressed his marrow. Perhaps, in the course of the past year, the reaction to the virus spontaneously subsided: if so, the virus might be dormant in his system, capable of reawakening one day and wreaking havoc. Another scenario was that his illness was an early sign of an autoimmune disease, like lupus. Perhaps Dr. Hochman's initial immunosuppressive therapy had serendipitously contained the disease before it was fully manifest. It, too, could return. Orkin has remained healthy to this day, but the cause of his illness continues to be elusive. There is no way of knowing more until medical science has advanced. Orkin's antibodies, lymphocytes, and stem cells are still stored in my laboratory. One day we might retrieve them and, using new tools, solve the mystery of his disease. But even then medicine would not be physics; human biology is too variable to be reduced to mathematical calculation. Intuition would still count, and so would luck. ♦



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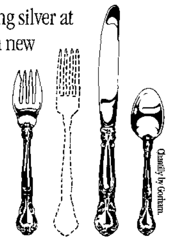

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PROFILE

A SLAVE IN NEW YORK

From Africa to the Bronx, one man's long journey to freedom.

BY WILLIAM FINNEGAN

NEW YORK CITY'S record as a haven for runaway slaves has been mixed. Runaways filled the city during the Revolutionary War. Then George Washington, after his victory, tried to have them returned to their former owners. The Underground Railroad had, in its heyday, a way station on Second Avenue. And yet slave-catching remained a lively local business until the eve of the Civil War.

Moctar Teyeb, who is a runaway slave from Mauritania, arrived here four years ago. "It was very beautiful," he told me recently. "This freedom, America. You cannot imagine." It was also, I think, very difficult. Teyeb and I were walking near Trinity Church, on lower Broadway—George Washington's New York, geographically speaking—when he recognized a building. "Oh," he said. "I went there my first week in America. Maybe second week. I have no money, I speak no English. Somebody say there is office that can help me. But I never find it."

It was a chilling scene—the slight, scared black man, lost and unable to communicate, in the cold, vertiginous streets of the financial district—but the memory of it didn't seem to faze Teyeb. We turned onto Wall Street, and he pointed at the façade of the New York Stock Exchange. "Is it church?" he asked.

"Church of money," I said.

He laughed merrily.

Teyeb's life in New York is still difficult. He is still broke—or "broken," as he puts it—and still trying to find his way. When I started visiting him, early last year, he was living in a ground-floor room on Echo Place, near East Tremont Avenue, in the Bronx. I naturally wanted to know how, at the end of the twentieth century, he came to be a runaway slave.

"I am troublemaker," he said simply. "That is what they say." Dark-eyed, soft-spoken, and deeply polite, Teyeb actually struck me, from the moment I met him, as the antithesis of a troublemaker. He seemed to float down the streets of his rather tough neighborhood wrapped in a small, protective cloud of African amiability. But the distance he has travelled—from rural eastern Mauritania, where he grew up, through various countries in West Africa and the Maghreb, and finally to the United States—is perhaps better measured in centuries than in statute miles. And the anonymity of an unattached, impoverished immigrant's life in New York City is a poor window, surely, onto the person he was back in the generations-deep intimacy of a Berber village in the southern Sahara.

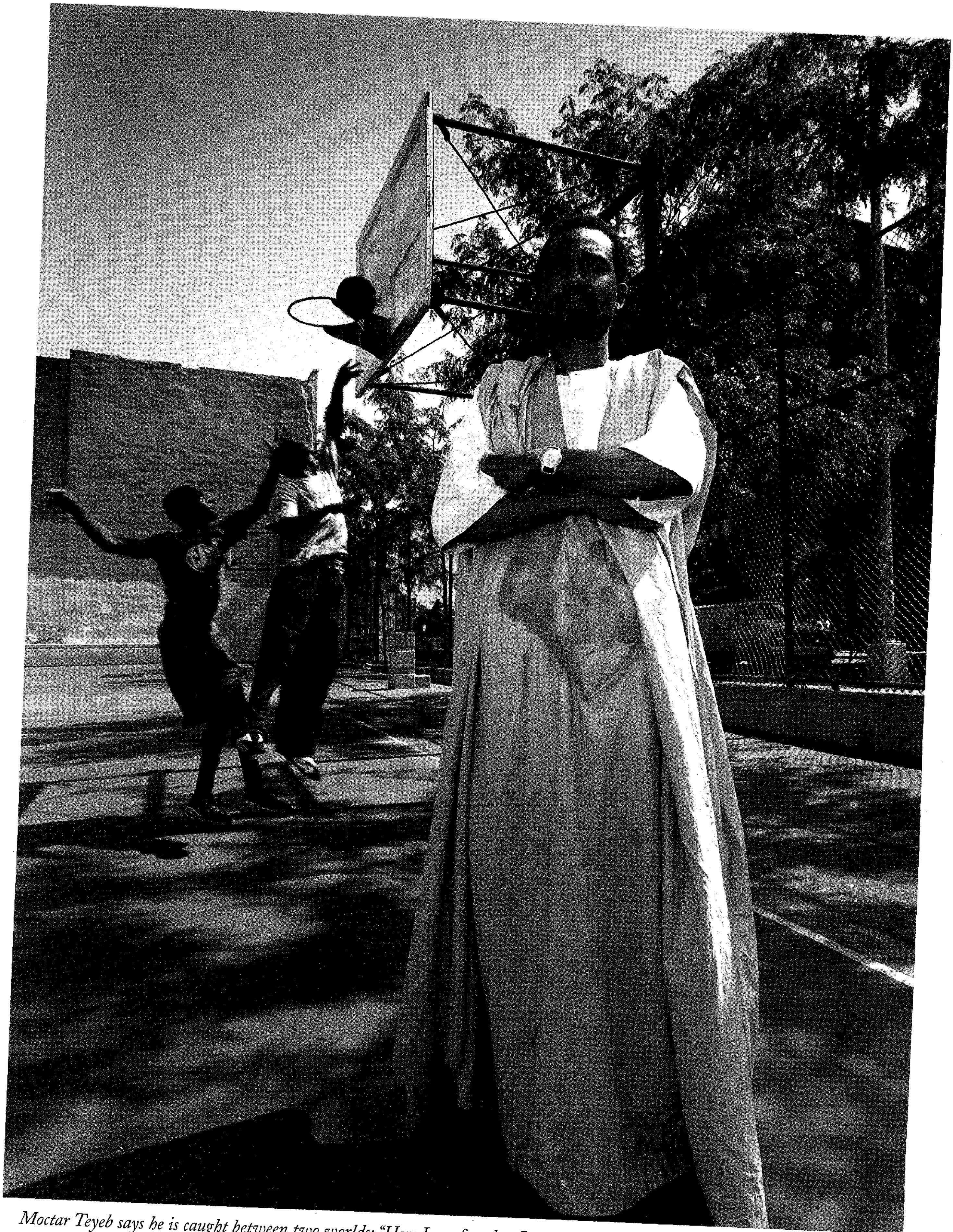
"Everybody in my village, master *and* slave, believe I am strange, crazy, sinful," Teyeb said. "They even call me unbeliever. That is the worst you can call someone in Mauritania. But I always ask questions. I knew something was wrong."

What was wrong, to Teyeb's mind, was that he was born, in 1959, *abd*—a slave. More specifically, as he grew up, it was that he was not allowed inside a schoolroom. One of his chores as a child was to take his master's children to school each morning on a camel, then to bring the camel back to the village. When young Moctar tried to stay, even to listen through a window, he was chased away. The local Koranic school also turned him away. After he persisted, his master ordered his mother to beat him. She did so, leaving a permanent scar on his right hand. "For the Haratin," Teyeb explained, "Paradise is under the feet of his master—that is what the Beydanes say, and the Haratin say it, too."

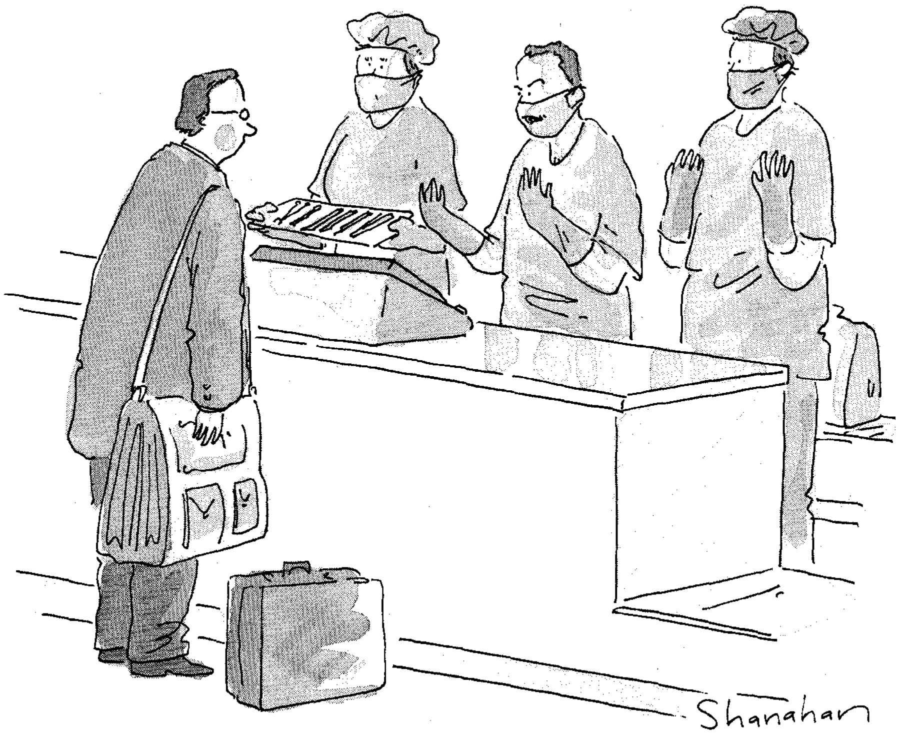
The Beydanes, also known as White Moors, are the ruling caste in Mauritania. They are Arab Berber tribesmen whose ancestors established control in the seventeenth century. The Haratin, also known as Black Moors, are the descendants of black West Africans conquered and enslaved by the Beydanes centuries ago. Although some Haratin have gained their freedom, many remain in bondage. Teyeb is Haratin, but when I asked him what ethnic group his father belonged to he said, "You don't understand. My father had no 'ethnic group.' He was *property of* ethnic group, just as cattle is property of. We are slaves of an Arab tribe, Ould Nasser, which is very strong. It controls large area, with many date palms. My situation is same as my father. I have no ethnic group, no name except slave of."

During Teyeb's childhood, most Mauritanians led nomadic or seminomadic lives. (A catastrophic drought has since destroyed much of the country's grazing lands, driving many people into towns.) His early memories are of long treks with the tribe's herds—cattle, camels, and goats—through lands where the predators were hyenas, jackals, and bears. "We followed the grass. The Beydanes rode on camels, but we walked, or rode on cows. For a Beydane, it is shameful to ride on a cow. They had proper tents, made from wool. They stood up high, with two peaks. Our tents, the tents of the Haratin, were more primitive, made from old clothes, very crowded. The Haratin did all the work—hauling water, pounding durum—which is shameful for a Beydane to do. And when we slaughtered lambs the Haratin got only the stomach and the neck. The Beydanes got the rest." Teyeb, who was a frail boy, was trained as a servant. "I washed the hands of my master and his guests. I washed the clothes of his children. I learned to make tea properly." Once, he said, he was sent on a commercial caravan: twenty or thirty camels carrying lake-bed salt to Mali, where it was bartered for sorghum.

Teyeb conjured these ancient desert scenes for me in a dreamy, thoughtful voice, as if he were contemplating them in English for the first time. Outside it was snowing, but his room was warm. A



Moctar Teyeb says he is caught between two worlds: "Here I am free, but I am also a slave." Photograph by Bastienne Schmidt.



"I can get you to San Francisco through Dallas via Atlanta, but we'd have to take a kidney right here and now."

perfumed candle burned. Sweet tea cooled in glasses on a tray between us. I asked about some lines of Arabic taped on the wall. It was a verse from the Koran, Teyeb said. He translated it as "God will surely not punish his servants for no reason."

I asked about slave revolts.

Teyeb said they were rare, almost unknown. "The Haratin are not usually held by physical force," he said. "They are not even always living in the same place with their master. But they still have the relationship, wherever they are. They are still slaves. Their master can call them and they must come. He can take their children. He can give their children as gifts to his relatives or his friends. Slavery is a state of *mind*, and most Haratin believe the slavery system is part of Allah's command. They don't know another way of life. Here in America, there is so much information: books, newspapers, TV, radio, Internet. There we had only the birds, telling us where the water could be, and the Beydanes, telling us to work. If a Haratin doesn't obey his master, yes, he can be punished, put in jail, or even killed."

I recalled reading about "the camel treatment," a torture traditionally administered to unruly slaves. A Human Rights Watch report on Mauritania described the procedure: "The slave's legs are tied to the sides of a camel who has deliberately been denied water for up to two weeks. The camel is then taken to drink and as the camel's stomach expands, the slave's legs, thighs, and groin are slowly dislocated." The report went on to quote a local informant: "A slave I know suffered the camel treatment in 1988 in Sharat, west of Boghé. His master suspected him of wanting to escape, because they found him on the road when he was not meant to be there. In addition, he was an outspoken young man who tended to reply back to the master and his family and made it clear that he did not like the life of a slave. He was recaptured and put through the camel method. He was 16 at the time. He is still living with his master's family but is so handicapped that he is not capable of performing any tasks."

Teyeb knows similar stories, but extreme brutality, he says, is the exception in master-slave relations in Mauritania. "It's a *system*," he said. "It starts when you are small child. If you are Beydane, there is always a Haratin child serving you. If you are Haratin, you don't even have proper name. If your name is Mohammed, that must be broken, made short. M'am'd!" He barked the broken name. "The Haratin is ridiculed if he tries to read a book, or wear a watch, or ride a good horse. In our literature, there are many stories about the Haratin who learns some verses of the Holy Koran, and then he is called names, and shamed until he hates himself."

Teyeb paused, an uncharacteristically bitter expression on his face. "He hates *himself*," he repeated quietly.

"The system is so complete," he went on. "My master is not rich, but he is big chief, and one of his brothers was diplomat—an educated person. But he brought his slaves even here, to the United States. Why? Because the Beydanes don't like food that is prepared by a hand that is not a slave. They believe an important man must have slaves around him to show he is wealthy. And they think physical work is shameful. The educated ones, they know the world doesn't like slavery. They tell their slaves to tell foreigners that they are workers, that they are paid. And if we speak out they say, 'Why are you against us? These foreigners are against Islam.' Religion is a big part of the system. To be against slavery is to be against religion."

Teyeb was sitting cross-legged on a bed that took up most of the room. Next to the bed was a green fringed prayer rug. When I asked about it, he said he used it when he didn't have time to go to mosque. He prays, he said, at least five times a day. On the room's only table were stacks of books: Plato's dialogues and Fanon's "The Wretched of the Earth" and "A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul."

Teyeb's clashes with his masters escalated, he said, as he grew older and refused to drop his interest in education. He followed orders reluctantly, and at thirteen had his arm broken for his insolence. His mother was frantic. "She always say, 'What can we do? Our ancestors accepted this. God wants it. What is wrong with it?' She thinks I am in rebellion."

Teyeb's father thought differently. Even though he had no ethnic group, he came from a family that, on both sides, retained an ancestral memory of a time before slavery. He spoke some Pulaar and Wolof, languages from the south, and his family, even as Haratin, had a reputation for bravery gained in wars between rival Beydane emirates. "So he could never accept completely to submit," Teyeb said. His father made bricks and charcoal, when he was not herding his master's cattle, and he sometimes sold the bricks—in bold defiance of his status as a slave. Finally, while out on a cattle drive in the early nineteen-seventies, he saw his chance and fled to Senegal.

Teyeb yearned to follow him. But he didn't prepare himself by mapping routes or devising ruses. Instead, he continued to struggle in secret to learn to read. He memorized his master's children's lessons from school. He memorized vast stretches of the Koran. At seventeen, he got his hands on a set of composition books and tried to teach himself to write.

There is a truism that it is impossible to enslave an educated man, and Teyeb had somehow acquired, even as a child, a visceral understanding of the essential incompatibility of literacy and chattel slavery. For him, getting an education became indivisible from claiming his humanity.

In 1977, he quietly announced to his master's family his ambition to become a teacher, which led to a humiliating confrontation with his master's wife, who scorned his dream. His master sent him to the capital, Nouakchott, to work in a household there. But slave life in the city was less closely monitored than in an isolated village, and Teyeb realized that this was his opportunity to escape. In July, 1978, he slipped away, hitching a ride on a truck to the border at the Senegal River. With money given to him by a friend, he bribed the border guards to let him leave Mauritania without papers.

He found his father in Kaolack, in central Senegal. "My father could not read, but he understood my ambitions to study. He loved me too much." Having heard that educational opportunities were greater in Ivory Coast, Teyeb and his father headed there, by way of Mali. "It was difficult trip," Teyeb said. His voice caught. "We got arrested too much." He stopped. He stared into the flame of the candle. After a minute, he resumed. "Finally, we came to Ivory Coast," he said. "And there, for first time, at age of twenty-two, I sat in a classroom and was allowed to look at the teacher."

WHEN Americans think of slavery, they generally think of plantation slavery. And yet slavery has been practiced, in many different forms, in a vast number of societies, throughout human history—in that sense, it is far from being a "peculiar institution"—and in the Arab world, where slavery was deeply established long before the founding of Islam, plantation slavery has been relatively rare. Slaves, often captured in war, were traditionally used as soldiers and domestic servants. Harems that included slave women were common among the more affluent classes. Owing to the popularity of concubinage, female slaves were generally more valuable than males—unless the males had been castrated, as a horrifying number were. Indeed, butcheries were established along the main slave-trade routes for the production of eunuchs.

The Prophet Muhammad urged owners not to mistreat their slaves, even to consider freeing them, and Islamic scholars and jurists have been debating ever since just who may enslave whom and under what conditions. As a rule, good Muslims are not supposed to enslave fellow-Muslims. But this precept often got lost in the tremendous expansion of Islam from its Arabian cradle, and it was always susceptible, in any event, to local interpretation. In the Middle Ages, Eastern Europe supplied the Arab world with a great many white slaves—Christians, Jews, and others—but the traffic in black Africans, transported by caravan across the Sahara or down the Nile, eventually came to dominate the Arab slave trade. Although records are poor, many historians believe that the total number of blacks taken north as slaves into the Arab world exceeds the roughly ten million believed to have been captured and shipped across the Atlantic to the New World.

The abolitionist movement that emerged in the West after the Enlightenment had no analogue in the Arab world. Equivalents to Christian dissenters such as Quakers, Methodists, and Unitarians never arose within Islam, and it was only under sustained pressure from the European imperialist powers that Muslim regimes began to curtail the open slave trade. The last big trans-Saharan slave caravan arrived in Libya in 1929. Slavery itself was eventually outlawed everywhere—even Saudi Arabia got around to making it illegal, in 1962—but resistance to what was rightly seen as a profound attack on the Muslim social structure was fierce

MARISA ACOCELLA

"Been there. Done him."

in the more conservative countries, and in practice the abolition was far from complete. Pilgrims making the hajj to Mecca were observed, in a British parliamentary report in 1960, arriving from various countries with slaves in tow as "living traveller's cheques"—to be sold, as needed, to cover expenses.

Mauritania has abolished slavery three times, most recently in 1980. But the laws that might give force to these abolitions have never been enacted. The 1980 abolition ordered compensation to slave owners—not to slaves—but made no provision for payment of the compensation, or for enforcement of the law, or even for dissemination of the good news to the emancipees, who have, for the most part, remained in bondage. (No one knows how many slaves there are in Mauritania. Estimates vary from ninety thousand to three hundred thousand.) The importance of modern, secular laws in a country as poor, backward, and entirely Islamic as Mauritania can be easily overstated. Other authority structures—customary law and, especially, religious law as interpreted by Sharia courts, which in Mauritania have traditionally upheld the property rights of slaveholders—are often stronger than written, Western-style laws. Since its independence, in 1960, Mauritania has been afflicted, in any case, with a series of brutal Beydane regimes that have little use for a concept such as the rule of law.

The main threat to Beydane rule, though, has come not from the Beydanes' slaves and servants, the Haratin, but from the country's third major bloc: blacks in the south who were never enslaved and are known in Mauritania as Negro Africans. Census figures are unreliable, the government having a powerful interest in exaggerating Beydane numbers, but all three groups are probably about the same size. (The country's total population is between two million and three million.) The Negro Africans speak local languages—Pulaar, Wolof, Soninke, Bambara—and, as a lingua franca, French, not Arabic, which is the official national language. Although they, too, were converted en masse to Islam centuries ago, their cultural affiliations tend to be with other black Francophone peoples, to the south, rather than with their fellow-Mauritanians. The overriding political aim of the ruling Beydanes is to keep their two black subject populations, the Haratin and the Negro Africans, apart.

"When I was child, the Beydane always told us the Negro can turn into wild animal—lion, or bear," Teyeb said to me. He laughed lightly. "They told us the Negroes in the south eat *people*. And I thought about this when I went to Ivory Coast and Togo."

Teyeb had joined an underground anti-slavery movement, El Hor (The Free), before he left Mauritania, and he remains active in the organization today. The members of El Hor, which was founded in 1974, are mostly ex-slaves or escaped slaves, and those living inside Mauritania are subject to intense repression. The alliance the Beydanes fear—between Negro African opposition groups and Haratin movements such as El Hor—has never coalesced, for many reasons, including the regime's calculated use of Haratin shock troops in campaigns against the southerners. In one such campaign, beginning in 1989, tens of thousands of Negro African farmers were driven from their lands, many into exile in Senegal. Hundreds were killed and thousands imprisoned, and bitterness about the Haratin's role in this pogrom is still fresh and deep.

Haratin activists like Teyeb, however, believe that it is the Negro Africans' traditional neutrality on the slavery issue which has bred the greatest distrust between the two black groups. "Now, when they see that opposing slavery can bring them international support, they

FEATHERING

Many heads before mine have waked
in the dark on that old pillow
and lain there, awake, wondering
at the strangeness within themselves
they had been part of, a moment ago.

She has ripped out the stitches
at one end and stands on the stone table
in the garden holding the pillow like a sack
and plunges her fingers in and extracts
a thick handful of breast feathers.

A few of them snow toward the ground,
and immediately tree swallows appear.
She raises the arm holding the down
straight up in the air,
and stands there, like a mom

at a school crossing, or a god
of seedtime about to release
a stream of bits of plenitude,
or herself, long ago at a pond, chumming
for sunfish with bread crumbs.

At the lift of a breeze, her fist
loosens and parcels out a slow
upward tumble of dozens of puffs
near zero on the scale of materiality.
More swallows loop and dive about her.

Now, with a flap, one picks up speed
and streaks in at a feather, misses, stops,
twists and streaks back and this time
snaps its beak shut on it, and soars,
and banks back to where its nest box is.

A few more flurries, and she ties off
the pillow, ending for today
the game they make of it when she's there,
the imperative to feather one's nest
come down from the Pliocene.

At the window, where I've been watching
through bird glasses, I can see
a graceful awkwardness in her walk,
as if she's tipsy, or not sure
where she's been, and yet is deeply happy.

Sometimes when we're out at dinner and a dim mood
from the day persists in me, she flies up and
disappears a moment, plucking out of the air
somewhere this or that amusement or comfort
and, back again, lays it in our dinner talk.

Once, when it was time to leave, she stood up
and, scanning about the restaurant for the restroom,
went up as if on tiptoe, like the upland plover.
In the taxi we kissed a mint from the desk
from my mouth to hers, like cedar waxwings.

Later, when I padded up to bed,
I found her dropped off, the bedside lamp
still on, an open book face down over her heart;
and though my plod felt quiet
as a cat's footfalls, her eyes at once opened.

And when I climbed into our bed and crept
toward the side of it lined with the down comforter
and the warmth and softness of herself,
she took me in her arms and sang to me
in high, soft, clear, wild notes.

—Galway Kinnell

pretend they always opposed it," he said. "But they were not interested before." Teyeb said that even Beydanes who fall from favor with the government have claimed, when seeking political asylum in the West, that they face persecution in Mauritania for anti-slavery activism. "I know some of these Beydanes," he said, incredulous. "They still own slaves at home!"

He sighed. "You know, I met some of them, here in New York. They say our religion recommends forgiveness. I say, 'It is not a matter of forgiveness. It is a matter of rights, of justice. This is not something from the *past.* It's happening *now.*' They argue with me. They say many stupid things. But I tell myself, 'Be patient, Moctar. This is history. History take long, long time.' "

Teyeb studied me. "This is my issue," he said finally. "I don't take vacation."

I noticed a tape player on the table and asked if he had any Mauritanian music. He grinned and stuck a tape in the machine. Slow drumming and Arabic wailing and some kind of deep gut-picking filled the room, suddenly making it feel as if we were in a tent in the Sahara, a million miles from the Bronx. "This is *beautiful* poem," Teyeb exclaimed. "It is very famous, very popular. We call it 'Cassette of the Slave Woman.' " He gestured emphatically toward the tape player, his eyes flashing. I had never seen him so animated. "That is the Beydane telling the slave woman why he shamed her!" He pointed at the tape. "And now she is *answering* him." Teyeb was exultant.

When the tape ended, his grin slowly faded. "The government in Mauritania became ashamed of slavery only recently," he said. "But the government cannot erase the literature of our country, all the songs and poems about slaves and slavery—because that is the life we lead."

Teyeb was attending English classes five nights a week at Bronx Community College. I went to school with him one evening. The students spent the first hour in a computer lab, working individually on essays about "The Great Gatsby." In Teyeb's copy of the novel, I noticed, the margins were crowded with notes in Arabic. They were mostly definitions of words, both words from the text and adjacent words from the Arabic-English dictionary which had caught Teyeb's eye: not just "perpetuate" but also a little treatise on "peripatetic"; not just "veteran" but also "vex." This struck me as a brave, voracious, and literary approach to learning English. What I really wanted to know was what Teyeb thought of Jay Gatsby and Daisy Buchanan. But he was busy struggling with a software program that refused to let him write words it didn't recognize, including "Gatsby."

All of Teyeb's classmates were Latinos. Most, I found, in conversations before the class began, were Dominicans, and all were high-school graduates. Many had graduated from New York City high schools—without the English proficiency to pass City University's language entrance exam. They were a relaxed and lively group. Three or four would be at the blackboard writing grammar sentences in a tangle of arms and studious intensity, with classmates calling out advice while quiet semantic debates, mostly in Spanish, buzzed in the background.

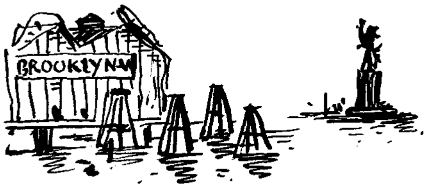
Teyeb stood out sharply from the others—not just because he was the only African but because he was by far the most formally dressed, wearing a pearl-gray three-piece suit and a perfectly knotted gray necktie among a welter of T-shirts, sweatshirts, and denim. Taking careful notes, he displayed a faint smile, giving him an obliging affect. But he did not participate in the classroom banter, and his seriousness seemed to create a hard, clear cone around him.

Teyeb's determination to get an education has been the star by which he has navigated a thousand storms since he fled Mauritania. After learning French in Ivory Coast, he left his father, with terrible sadness, and made his way to Ghana. Then, after five attempts, he managed to enter Togo, where he persuaded the French Embassy to give him papers certifying that he was Mauritanian, which he used to talk his way into a short-lived Libyan scholarship program that Muammar Qaddafi had opened to all citizens of Arab League countries (Mauritania is one). Teyeb thus left West Africa on a one-way ticket to the southwestern Libyan city of Sabha, where he found himself the only black student. The other Mauritanians were all Beydanes, and student politics were fiercely Arab-nationalist. Teyeb studied hard, and earned a certificate in electrical engineering. He next landed, on another scholarship, at an Islamic institute in Marrakech, Morocco, where he studied literature and Islamic law. He was thrilled with the level of instruction in Marrakech, and in his third year won an important academic prize. But the other Mauritanians at the institute were, again, all Beydanes, and Teyeb began to have political problems, particularly after other students learned that he belonged to El Hor.

He returned to Libya, to pursue a law degree at the University of Garyounis, in Benghazi. His daily life, both personal and political, remained precarious. He lived in constant danger of being accused by Beydane fellow-students of harboring anti-Arab sentiments—and he had no protectors inside the Libyan state apparatus. "I understand my place in the Arab world," he said. "I appreciate that they accept me to get my education. Beyond that, we rarely agree." Teyeb was becoming a scholar, beginning to publish articles, but he wrote nothing about slavery. The only people with whom he could even talk privately about slavery were a few black students from southern Sudan, another region where Arabs are still enslaving blacks. When I asked how he managed to keep body and soul together in Benghazi, he shrugged. "Everything is struggle," he said. "Foreign students were not allowed to work. I ate usually one meal a day, sometimes less. Some people helped me. Books were difficult. Clothes. I am very careful with my clothes. This suit"—Teyeb indicated the pearl-gray suit he was wearing—"I have from Libya, twelve years now." To my eye, the suit looked almost new. He owned, I knew, a fancy djellabah that he kept for special occasions. Otherwise, he never seemed to leave his room dressed in anything but a suit.

Teyeb admired Libyan lawyers for the skill they showed in shipping disputes with the country's Mediterranean neighbors, and he specialized in maritime law, writing a thesis on international law pertaining to islands. He received his law degree in 1993. Afterward, he made his way to Tunisia, then back to Morocco. But he found that, without a passport, he could work nowhere. Finally, he decided to return to Mauritania. He stayed six months. His situation was curious. The police forbade him to leave Nouakchott, and they regularly picked him up for interrogation. But they never put him in jail. It seemed there were Mauritanian officials who owed Teyeb—or people he knew—favors, and he was counting on them for both protection and a passport. His master, moreover, seemed to have no interest in reclaiming him. Twice, Teyeb saw his master and his master's brother, the diplomat, on the streets in Nouakchott, and both times they avoided him. "They didn't want to meet me because they knew I was now an educated man," he explained. "They knew that I could *speak*."

The hopeful truism—that an educated man cannot be kept a slave—had come true. This is, of course, the logic behind the Beydanes' hostility to education for Haratin—and, for that matter, behind a Virginia state law, passed in 1831, forbidding schooling for blacks, whether slaves or free, and a subsequent statute barring from the state any black who left Virginia to learn to read and write. (Other Southern states had similar laws.) Although there have been educated slaves of various kinds at various times, they have been the rare exceptions. In the Arab world, to be *abd* is, in social terms, to be subhuman. Evolutionary biologists speak of the juvenilization that domesticated animals undergo, gradually losing the large teeth, long jawbones, and aggression of their wild forebears. A similar transformation is what slaveholding castes ultimately intend for their slaves. And this is the process that Teyeb has spent his life resisting and reversing. Watching him among his classmates in the Bronx, I realized that his singularity also had this odd, frightening aspect: nobody else in the room, whatever his disadvantages, had been raised in a society built and bent on turning him into a draft animal.

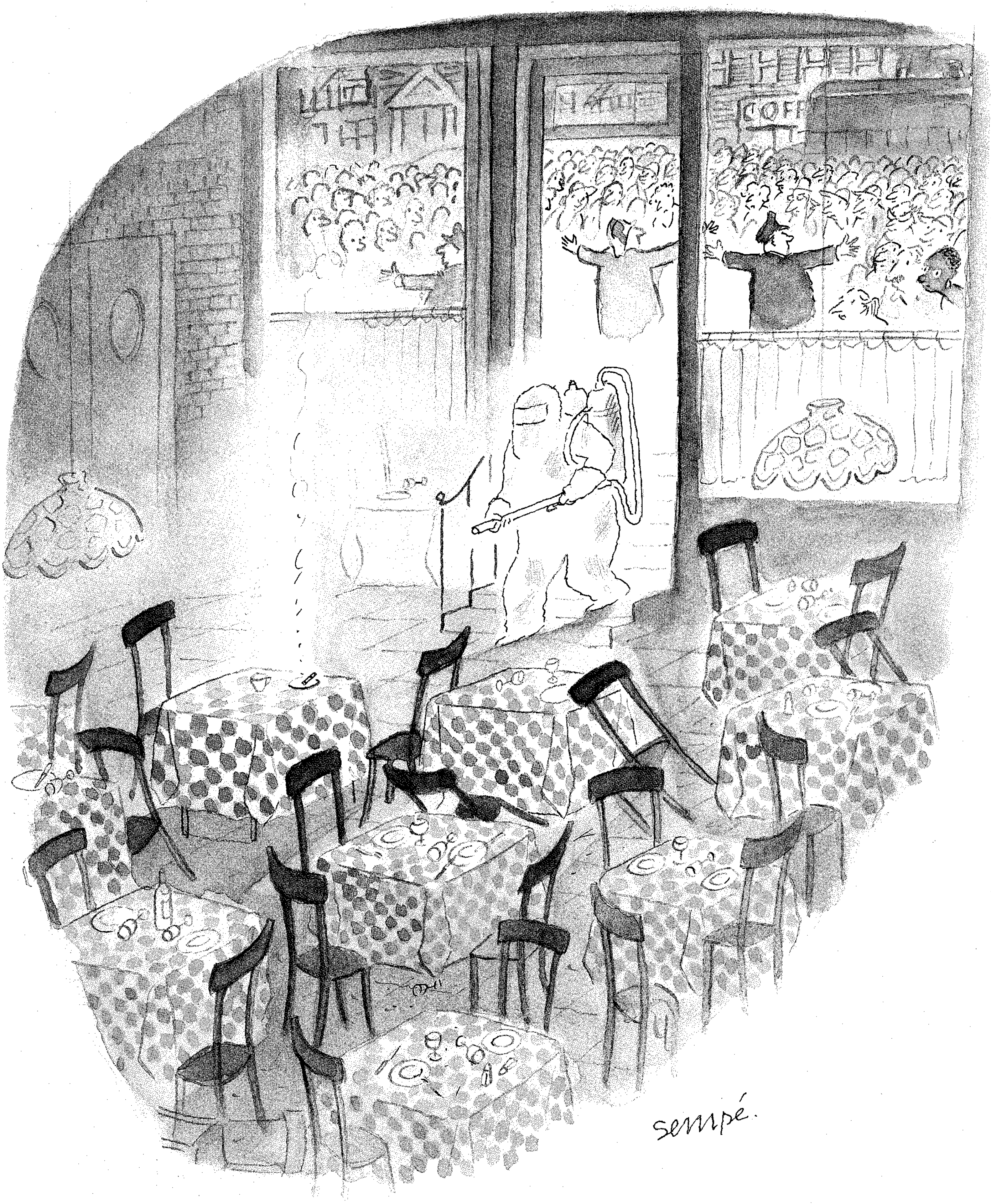


Becoming something else instead, becoming human, is, moreover, an unending project. Teyeb knows that his studies in Morocco helped make him an educated man, deeply versed in Arabic literature, world history, and Islamic law. Still, he says, "It was hard—very hard—to know who I am. Because, you know, I come from big pain." He falls silent, brooding, I assume, on the place he comes from—Big Pain—and on all the people still there.

During his six months in Nouakchott, he was permitted to see his mother for ten days. (His father had died, in 1989, without having seen Mauritania again.) Teyeb's passport finally came through, along with a visa for the United States. He flew to New York, where he had a relative who had come to this country to work for his master, the diplomat—the brother of Teyeb's master. Although his relative had been allowed to remain in the United States, Teyeb said, "the relationship continued." His relative had a livery cab, and when his master or any of his rich Beydane friends came to New York he drove them around. Teyeb stayed in his relative's apartment in Harlem, where he was appalled to see photographs of his relative's master and family hanging on the walls. He overheard his relative telling visitors that the light-skinned men in the photographs were his "cousins." Teyeb and his relative are deeply at odds. "He is brainwashed," Teyeb said sadly. "Like so many Haratin." Teyeb, having found work in some small, Yemeni-owned shops around the city, moved to his own place in the Bronx.

His current plan is to improve his English until he can get into a law school here. He dreams of returning to Mauritania to fight for the rights of the Haratin, and he believes that an American law degree may give even an aggrieved government pause while considering the actions it might safely take against him. In truth, though, it might not help: many of El Hor's leaders and members have been arrested,

SKETCHBOOK BY J. J. SEMPÉ



tortured, and driven into exile. Others have been silenced more gently—with comfortable government jobs.

TEYEB and I begin taking little trips together. Moving around in America with him is, I find, like travelling with an inquisitive extraterrestrial. Studying randomly scattered houses in a patch of New England woods as we flash past in a train, he asks, "Why do they live out here in the trees?" I can't think of an answer. ("Sprawl?") He spots some mobile homes and asks about them. Hearing that they're built elsewhere and are hauled around by truck, he exclaims, "Like tents! People find them and say, 'Good tent,' and move in." Inside a vast McDonald's in Pennsylvania, which busloads of schoolkids have turned into a lunch-hour mosh pit, I am making no progress toward the order counter, and a kindly woman advises us to go outside and order from the drive-up window. It works, and Teyeb says, "That woman must be very experienced with McDonald's. Was this her good deed for Easter?" I didn't know that people *did* good deeds for Easter.

On one occasion, in Boston, as we emerge from an elevator into a corridor, having just escaped from a labyrinthine underground garage, we are abruptly confronted by a gym full of sweating, half-dressed, wild-eyed white people, separated from us by only a wall of glass, all thrashing aerobically to a hip-hop beat. Feeling visually assaulted, and vaguely embarrassed, I glance back at Teyeb. He gives me a huge grin and a thumbs-up. "Freedom!" he growls.

I get in the habit of asking what he's thinking. Not surprisingly, he often says he's thinking about slavery. On the subway into Manhattan, he says, "New York is full of poor people, homeless people. We see them, yes. It is terrible. But even these people have *rights*."

Holy Scripture, it seems, is never far from his mind. "I am thinking of Arab complexes about Jews and blacks," he says, on another occasion. "You know the story of Prophet Abraham—we call him Ibrahim—and Sarah, his wife. She was Jewish. He found no children by her. So she said he could try to have children with her servant, Hagar, who was Egyptian—black. And she became pregnant by him. But Sarah became jealous and Hagar ran away. And Ishmael, Ibrahim's son by Hagar, was the father of the Arabs. This is why the Arabs hate the Jews. This is why they have all these complexes today. Do you know who was Anwar Sadat's mother? A black woman!"

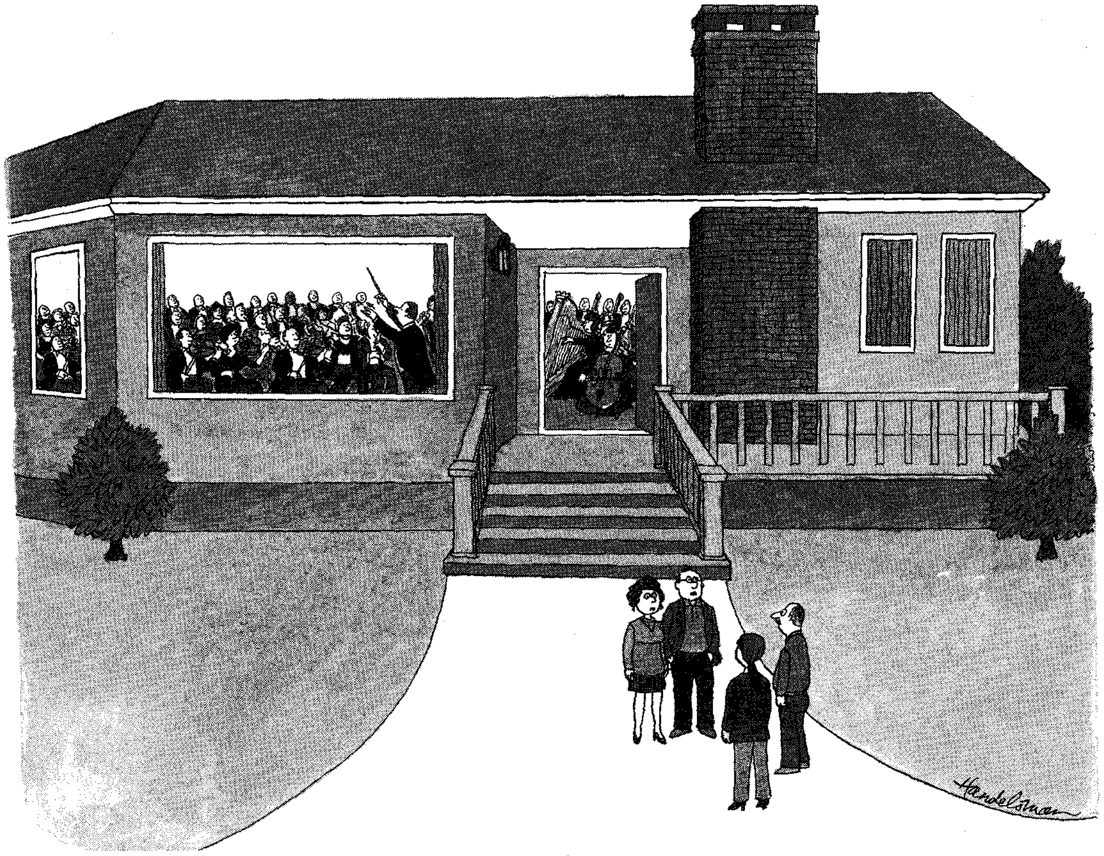
We drive up the Hudson to Nyack to see a Trinidadian friend of his. Beaming at the roadside greenery, Teyeb says, "It is like a part of Ghana between Accra and the Togo border. I crossed it many times, trying to enter Togo. It is very green there, with hills, not many trees. You can see *too far*. That was the time when I was crazy—no money, no food, just trying to find a place where I could get an education. I used to ride in the taxi and look out the window and think, *This* is Paradise."

CHARLES JACOBS, the founder and president of an organization called the American Anti-Slavery Group, was speaking to an official from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

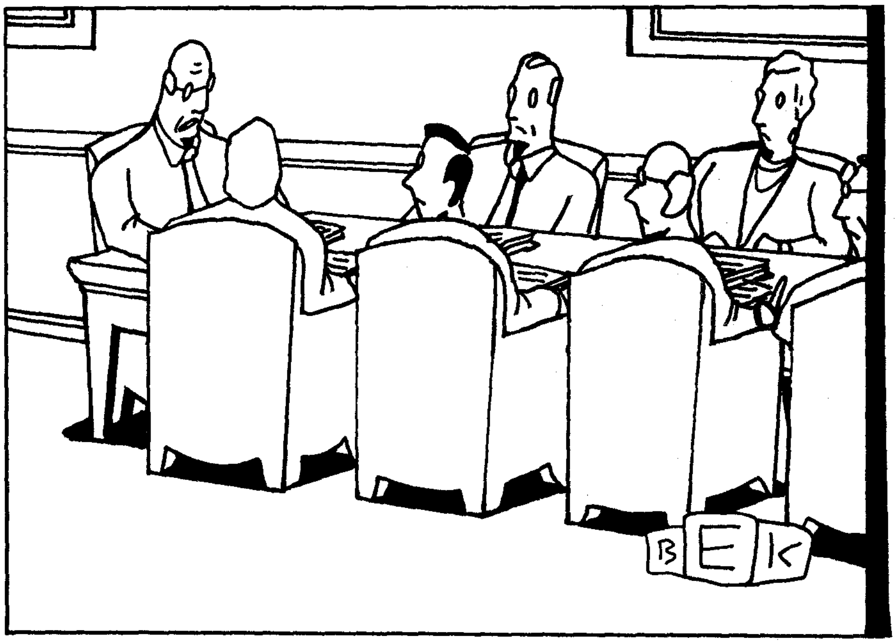
"He's like Frederick Douglass, and I'm like William Lloyd Garrison," Jacobs said.

We were in a hotel bar in Cambridge, and Jacobs was trying to interest the Kennedy School in sponsoring a program on contemporary slavery, featuring Moctar Teyeb. Teyeb, who had spoken that afternoon at a suburban Boston high school, looked tired and did not seem to be listening to Jacobs's pitch. But he had riveted the students with his account of slavery in Mauritania. And the Kennedy School official seemed interested.

Jacobs is a former management consultant. A big, fervent man in his fifties, he describes himself as a neo-abolitionist—hence his identification with Garrison, the preëminent nineteenth-century crusader against American slavery. His organization's first headquarters were a spare room in his house—a finely preserved Victorian in



"We tried six speakers, then twelve, and finally we put in the Pittsburgh Symphony, yet we still feel something is lacking."



"Now, before I give my pat answer, does anyone else have any dumb questions?"

suburban Boston. (They are now downtown.) Until he met Teyeb, most of Jacobs's anti-slavery work had been focussed on Sudan. Then he suddenly found that he had, in Teyeb, a powerful new spokesman, and he had begun trying to interest more Americans in Mauritania. A couple of weeks before, he and Teyeb had flown to Los Angeles, where Teyeb spoke at a conference, co-sponsored by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, and, from all reports, captivated a large audience.

But going public was risky for Teyeb. He was already hearing from Beydanes, he told me, who were outraged by what he was telling Americans about Mauritania. "The government is sending more *commissaires*," he said. "Security agents. Rough men. We must be careful." El Hor, he said, was monitoring the situation, but its intelligence-gathering in this country was weak. So far, the organization seemed warily pleased to be getting out its message in America, and Teyeb seemed pleased to be its tribune. At the high school that afternoon, the students had struggled gamely to get their minds around his description of Mauritania. Among their questions:

"Can't the Arab children be convinced that slavery is not cool?"

"Can you buy your freedom?"

"What if you become a U.S. citizen?"

Teyeb had sought to convey the psychological depth of slavery as an institution in Mauritania, and to shift the focus from his personal prospects to the plight of the Haratin as a whole. "It is not an individual matter," he said. At another point, he said, "I am a man caught between two worlds. Here in Boston I am free. But I am also a slave."

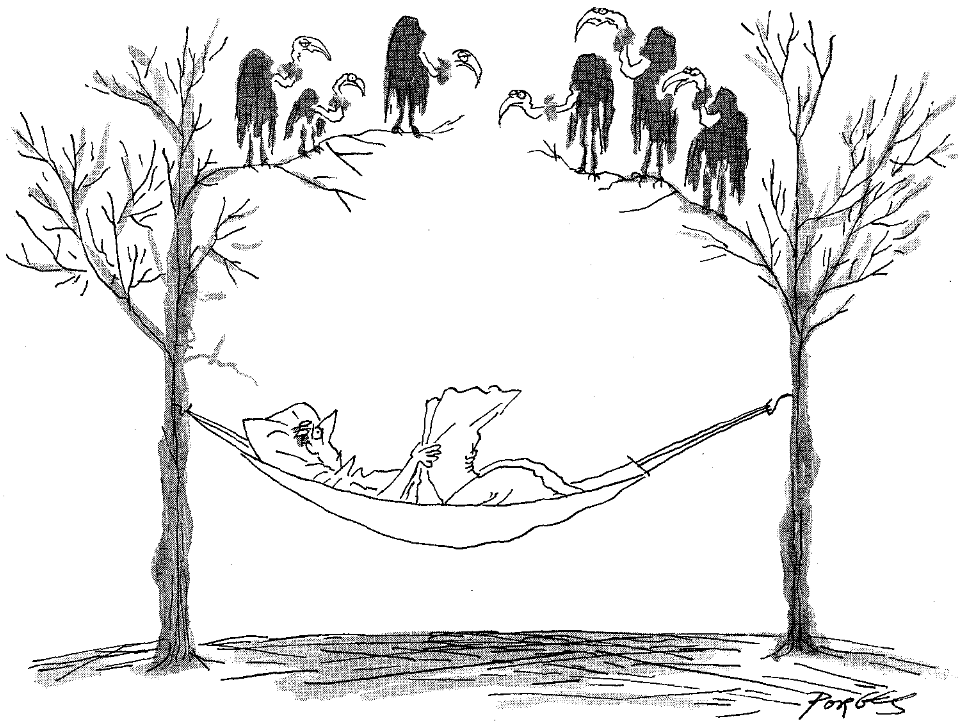
Listening to Teyeb talk about slavery with Americans—younger, older, black, white—is revealing. There are two broadly divergent views of slavery, even among historians of the subject. One holds that slavery equals "social death," that it is a type of absolute condition—a view neatly captured in a North African Tuareg adage, "Without the master, the slave does not exist." The other school of thought regards slavery as a negotiated state, noting the great variety of forms that bondage takes, how those forms change over time, and how, finally, slaves may sometimes use what limited social power they possess to stabilize, or even improve, their position. Teyeb, despite his abolitionist's passion for inflaming freedom-loving people against the great evil of slavery, inevitably holds the more nuanced view of the power relations between slaves and their masters. His American interlocutors often hold the absolutist view, in which shackles, bullwhips, and the crudest coercion are necessary elements.

But Americans come at Teyeb from all sorts of angles. Arthur Fuller, a dynamic young African-American who was teaching math at a middle school in Connecticut, decided to produce a CD-ROM about Teyeb's story. Although Fuller taught in the affluent suburb of Wilton, he also worked in inner-city Stamford, and the potential for using Teyeb's story to inspire poor black students was, he thought, unlimited. "It is such a positive story," Fuller told me. "This guy was born a *slave*. Now he has a degree in *law*. So you—no matter what situation you're coming out of, no matter what neighborhood you're from—you have no excuse. *No excuse*." Fuller gave a big, delighted laugh. He planned to call the CD-ROM "A Thirst for Knowledge."

The Kennedy School official said that she would take the slavery-program proposal back to her colleagues. She and Charles Jacobs exchanged business cards. Later, back at his house, Jacobs reckoned that the meeting had been promising, and that something might come of it. "But Sudan is really so much easier," he sighed. "And you know why? Because the people being persecuted, the people being enslaved there, are Christians. So we get a lot of support from Christian groups, both here and in Europe. When it's Muslims being enslaved, you don't have the same natural constituency. Certainly Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam have completely disgraced themselves on this issue. But when we point that out they, of course, point out that I'm a Jew."

Most of the people being enslaved in Sudan are not in fact Christians but followers of traditional African religions. Jacobs, who has not visited Africa, was right, though: Christian evangelical groups have done a great deal to expose the recent resurgence of slavery in Sudan.

TEYEB has some Mauritanian friends who live in Washington, D.C. We decide to go and see them. On the way, mindful of his interest in history, I drive through Gettysburg. We walk the soft, green hills of the great battlefield and stand for a long while at the spot, known as The Angle, where Union troops stopped Pickett's charge and five thousand men fell in a single hour. "It took this, and much more, to free your slaves," Teyeb murmurs. Later, reading the text of the Gettysburg Address from a monument near where Lincoln delivered it, Teyeb can't get enough exegesis from me. The unfamiliar words—"fourscore," "hallow," "perish"—the meanings folded within meanings, all fascinate



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him. He has a scholar's respect for detail, distinction, complexity, the abiding importance of language and memory. And this sense of history in its terrible thickness emerges, in another form, the next day. We've wandered into a museum exhibit in Washington: artifacts from an eighteenth-century ship that sank off Cape Cod. Among the old cannons and silverware, we pause over a rusted set of leg irons, relics from the ship's service in the slave trade. Teyeb stares at the shackles. "The human career is long," he says quietly. "And every step must be taken. Every step."

We stay with a young man named M'Brack in a sparsely furnished studio on the edge of office-block Washington. Though Teyeb is greeted warmly, we are obviously unexpected. "Don't worry," Teyeb tells me. "It's an African house, an open house. No one can control who will be here, who will sleep here. They must welcome. We are *nemadi*." I apparently look puzzled. Teyeb laughs. "Nomads!"

M'Brack immediately serves glasses of tea that look like tiny dark beers with pale foamy heads. Then he starts cooking. Two more young Mauritanians turn up, both buddies of Teyeb's. Rapid-fire Arabic and raucous laughter fill the air. Teyeb undergoes a startling personality change, just as he did when we listened to "Cassette of the Slave Woman." Quiet and careful in English, he is animated, confident, almost boisterous in Arabic. His jokes get big laughs from his friends. I have no idea what they're laughing about. M'Brack produces a huge platter of lamb, pasta, salad, and couscous, which he sets in the middle of the floor. We dig into the food with our hands, and as the conversation slows I manage to get some of it translated.

Opinions are mixed, it seems, about Teyeb's new public activism. At least one of his friends is very concerned—and, presumably, not happy—to hear that I am a journalist. Nearly everyone in the group is Haratin, and all seem to be involved, to varying degrees, in the anti-slavery movement. Teyeb is clearly the senior member of El Hor, but the exact positions, if any, of the others are not explained. One of the men comes from a prominent free Haratin family. His uncle was briefly, in fact, Mauritania's Ambassador to the United States. There is rueful laughter as the episode is recalled. "The government looks for educated Haratin it can use, to show the world we are no longer slaves," Teyeb explains. "So they sent a Haratin to be Ambassador here. Very good propaganda for them. But then he disobeyed. He talked to American newspapers about slavery! The government replaced him before one year."

Everyone in the group is a student, at least part time, and clearly enthusiastic about the opportunities and freedoms he finds in this country. United States policy toward Mauritania is another matter. Once, I am told, the United States consistently condemned slavery in Mauritania, and regularly named the government as a major human-rights violator. Economic pressure was applied, and the anti-slavery movement felt it had American support. Then the regime, which had long been close to Saddam Hussein, even backing Iraq in the Persian Gulf War, decided, in 1995, that it wanted American foreign aid and began to vote with the United States—and against Saddam—in the United Nations. "We are also against Saddam, of course," Teyeb says. "We also support peace in Middle East. But suddenly, now, the State Department says there is not slavery in Mauritania—only *vestiges* of slavery." The group at M'Brack's grimaces in unison, muttering the word "vestiges" with disgust. "That was the government's reward for abandoning Saddam."

A television is playing in the background. As the conversation begins to take off in Arabic again, I notice that, on the TV, Nicolas Cage and Laura Dern are reeling around in a vintage convertible, having sex every few minutes and, when they're not having sex, discussing the poetics and metaphysics of the sex they've been having. Nobody else at M'Brack's even glances at the TV. To them, I imagine, it's just more Western decadence, which is always flashing prettily, desperately, in the middle distance.

Or not so prettily. I remember Teyeb telling me how he came to despise rap music while staying with his relative in Harlem, where it blasted day and night. "Bad words," he said. "Not polite. Not *music*." I gave him the standard explanation for gangsta rap's brutality—an honest reflection of a brutal world, et cetera—but he was unconvinced. "Suffering can make people create beautiful music," he said. "Slavery in this country produced beautiful music—gospel, blues, jazz. This not beautiful music." The African revolutionary—because Teyeb is, in the Mauritanian context, a revolutionary—is at the same time, I thought, a cultural conservative.

And his dreams of going home are far from grandiose. He would like to live quietly, he once told me, in Ayoun el Atrous, the rural area where he was born.

He would like to have a law practice, representing destitute Haratin in civil and Sharia courts, helping them gain the rights of free people, including titles to the lands they work. He would build a small house, putting in electricity himself, and he would fill it with books.

Watching Teyeb and his friends chat, I am struck by the thought that, while they work as busboys, janitors, and cabdrivers here—African immigrants laboring near the bottom of the American pile—they probably all have hopes of becoming lawyers, businessmen, or administrators back in Mauritania. And yet their origins as Haratin make their prospects unusually contingent on political change at home. All of them, too, surely struggle, just as Teyeb does, with the deep structures of identity: to lift the mental harness of centuries of servitude. Indeed, Teyeb apparently confronts the most casual, profound Arab racism every day as he goes to work in the Yemeni shops around New York. "They still say *abd*," he once told me. "They are illiterate. I must help them with many things, but still they consider all blacks to be slaves."

The TV finally catches everyone's attention when Dennis Rodman appears. His antics draw appreciative laughter. "We have clowns like him in Mauritania," Teyeb explains. "They make you think that everything is against them, but really they are against everything. They are very funny. *Jowak*, we call them."

"*Jowak*," the others murmur.

People drift away, saying good night. M'Brack curls up on the apartment's only bed, hugging a cell phone and the TV's remote to his chest. Teyeb takes the couch, which is too short for me. I sleep on the floor on a thin pad that I find rolled in a corner.

In the morning, half awake, I watch Teyeb, who rises very early, move through his routine. He bathes and shaves—quickly, silently, meticulously. He gets fully dressed, in spotless jacket and tie. Then he spends a few minutes quietly praying in the corner, kneeling, forehead to the floor. Next he pulls a green prayer book from a little vinyl travel bag and passes half an hour studying it. Finally, he produces from his pockets and his bag a great collection of wadded paper scraps, which he spreads out on the couch around him and begins to pore over. My curiosity roused, I groggily ask what he's doing. He looks up, startled. "Vocabulary," he says.

CHARLES JACOBS wanted Teyeb to move to Boston to work full time with the American Anti-Slavery Group. He started telling people that Teyeb *was* moving to Boston. Teyeb was aghast. Jacobs, he felt, was taking liberties, talking too freely to too many people about both his future as a movement spokesman and his past as a slave. Jacobs was also vague about the exact role he planned for Teyeb with the Anti-Slavery Group. Teyeb asked Jacobs to put in writing the terms he was offering: his job title, his responsibilities, his salary, and so on. It was Jacobs's turn to be aghast. He had something less formal in mind. That, of course, was what Teyeb was afraid of. He was virtually penniless, and he needed to be paid, if possible, for the public speaking that Jacobs was arranging for him. He also wanted to know what his duties at the Anti-Slavery Group would be *beyond* telling Americans about his sad childhood. His appetite for telling that story was limited. It was painful, and he was more than just a runaway slave. He was a lawyer, a scholar, and a political activist. *His* organization, El Hor, had a policy, moreover, that discouraged its officers from emphasizing their personal stories.

Jacobs tried to explain to Teyeb that American audiences really respond only to personal stories, to pathos—to victims. While his aversion to displaying his wounds was understandable, he had an incredible opportunity to help eradicate slavery. With Jacobs's help, he could eventually find himself welcomed and heard at the highest levels. Neither of them could do it alone. Teyeb had a chance to become more than just a political activist. He could become an "icon"—like Gandhi, Frederick Douglass, or Kwame Nkrumah.

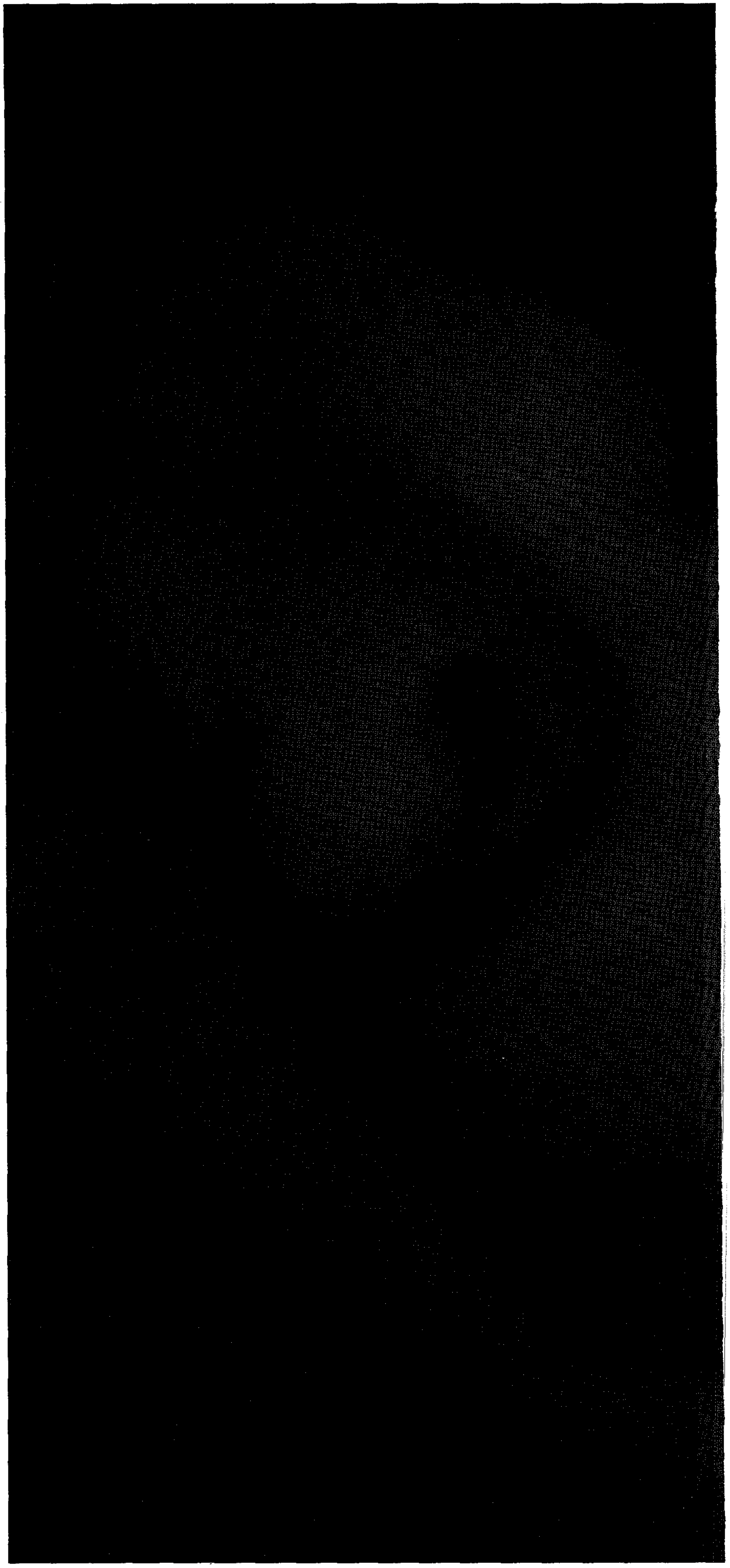
Teyeb was interested in Jacobs's arguments, but they did not change his own ideas about how to help his people. He did not move to Boston. He continues to work with Jacobs and the Anti-Slavery Group, doing some public speaking, but he does it on his own terms—and, it may be, on El Hor's. What Jacobs discovered, I think, is the same thing that Teyeb's master discovered long ago in Ayoun el Atrous, which is that Teyeb is an exceptionally stubborn and difficult cuss. (If he were otherwise, he'd still be an illiterate slave.) He does bear a certain resemblance to some of the icons of Third World liberation struggles, to men like Gandhi and Nelson Mandela—strong-minded lawyers who met their oppressors with an unfailing politeness, beneath which ran a will of tempered steel. And Teyeb you can see on the I.R.T. He's that slight, dark-skinned immigrant, all but invisible in slam-bang New York, studying his precious vocabulary on his way to stock shelves, perhaps, in a shop where the owners still say *abd.* ♦

"What's cool about this guy is that he's one-hundred-per-cent idea-free!"

SHOWCASE BY ANNIE LEIBOVITZ

WOMEN'S STUDIES

THE Pirelli calendar is a much loved institution in Europe and Great Britain—much loved by a lot of guys, anyway. It is a pinup wall calendar that is created exclusively for Pirelli's clients, and since the company's signature product is tires, it usually hangs in garages and the back rooms of car dealers. But the calendar also has great cachet outside the tire community. Old copies are hoarded by collectors, traded, and occasionally appear at auction. The idea for the calendar originated with a publicity director in Pirelli's London office in the early sixties—the swinging years. The tire connection was made most explicitly in the 1984 edition, when a set of painted-on tread marks wound across dunes and valleys formed by the naked bottoms of models lying on their stomachs on a beach. Over time, the models have become more celebrated (Naomi Campbell, Kate Moss), as have the photographers (Norman Parkinson, Herb Ritts, Richard Avedon, Bruce Weber). Annie Leibovitz's photographs for this year's calendar are a departure from the tradition in many respects. Leibovitz is known primarily as a portraitist, yet her Pirelli calendar doesn't evoke personalities, and faces are visible in only two of the pictures. She photographed torsos. "I didn't want the photographs to be sexual," she says. "I was interested in body studies." The bodies she chose do not (with one exception) belong to famous models. Most of the women, like June Omura, in the photograph on this page, are members of the Mark Morris Dance Group. Their bodies are "feminine but strong," Leibovitz says, like the nudes in the modernist studies Edward Weston made of lovers and friends in the twenties and thirties. She was also influenced by Paul Outerbridge's nude portaits of the same period, especially those in color. The soft, front lighting Leibovitz used made the surfaces of the women's bodies appear translucent. Their strength is tempered with fragility. An exhibition of the work opens at the Edwynn Houk Gallery in New York on January 20th. It includes a variant of a frontal nude that was . . . well, too sexual for the Pirelli people. —SHARON DELANO



EDWYNN HOUK GALLERY

LETTER FROM HOLLYWOOD

THE TWO-BILLION-DOLLAR MAN

How the screenwriter Ron Bass became the industry's hit machine.

BY TAD FRIEND

IT is pitch dark when Ron Bass rises each day, 4 A.M. at the latest. Dressed unvaryingly in a flannel shirt, corduroys, and Weejuns, he pads through the halls of his home in Brentwood as his wife and two daughters are sleeping upstairs. In his office, he walks to a pine lectern near the window and places a sheaf of yellow foolscap on it, beside which he props "the Book," a fat vinyl binder that holds the DNA for his current screenplay.

Clipped inside the Book are two pencil cases: one filled with newly sharpened No. 2 Sundance pencils, made by Blackfoot Indians, and one to receive those that grow dull during the morning's work. Bass selects a fresh pencil and flips through the binder's thousand pages of "blocking," suggestions made by the six writers who work for him—his "Team"—about incidents or "beats" for each of the script's sixty-odd scenes. Bass mulls over the blocking for his next scene and paces, muttering his characters' lines aloud. If it is a sad scene—a mother with cancer saying goodbye to her children; a man rising at an A.A. meeting to testify about his love for his alcoholic wife—Bass's murmurings grow husky, and he may pause to weep.

Bass has brown eyes and brown hair and a shaggy graying beard, and with his nervous, bowl-you-over manner he often quivers like a spaniel that has just scented a squirrel. And now he's off! Perhaps today he is dashing through a closing scene in "Mozart and the Whale," a script that he recently sold to Dreamworks SKG for more than two million dollars. It's about a man and a woman who have Asperger's Syndrome (a kind of autism), and their crabwise approach to intimacy. Bass has constructed a metaphor to suggest that we are all emotional amputees until love completes us. Let's take a look:

> The bride and groom turn to each other. And the depth of the look. The comfortableness of their silence. Stirs many hearts. The bride draws a breath . . .
>
> ISABELLE
> Donald. I have one leg. And so do you. But if we can hold on to each other . . .
>
> And her smile splits the world. All the brighter for its softness.
>
> ISABELLE
> . . . I'll teach you to dance.
>
> Somehow, that takes the groom's breath away. He sways a little, lost in the moment. And in her eyes. Bronwin's mother is moved to clap softly, and others pick it up, and little Gracie puts two fingers in her mouth and sends a piercing WHISTLE, which makes everyone LAUGH.
>
> And the tension is gone. But not the magic.

Someday that magic will beam down from two thousand movie screens. But it all begins with the script. At the age of fifty-seven, Bass is the most prolific and commercially successful screenwriter in the world. When *Daily Variety* recently saluted him as its first "billion-dollar screenwriter," his agents at Creative Artists Agency checked the tally and discovered that his movies had actually earned well over two billion dollars in theatres alone. Callie Khouri, who wrote "Thelma and Louise," says, "Ron is to screenwriting what Michael Crichton is to novels—he has the gift for telling big stories to a mass audience in a way they seem to love. And he just doesn't stop." Bass has five television movies to his credit, as well as sixteen feature films that he wrote or co-wrote, including such hits as "Rain Man," "Sleeping with the Enemy," "Waiting to Exhale," "Dangerous Minds," "My Best Friend's Wedding," "Stepmom," and "Entrapment." "Snow Falling on Cedars" opened at Christmas, and "Passion of Mind," starring Demi Moore, is due out in May.

Most A-list screenwriters are delighted if they can complete two screenplays a year; Bass typically writes seven. Writers have traditionally been the hapless serfs of Hollywood—"schmucks with Underwoods," as the mogul Jack Warner put it. But Bass has cracked the code: he routinely gets a producer's credit for his work, and more of his movies are made every two years than many highly paid screenwriters can claim in a lifetime.

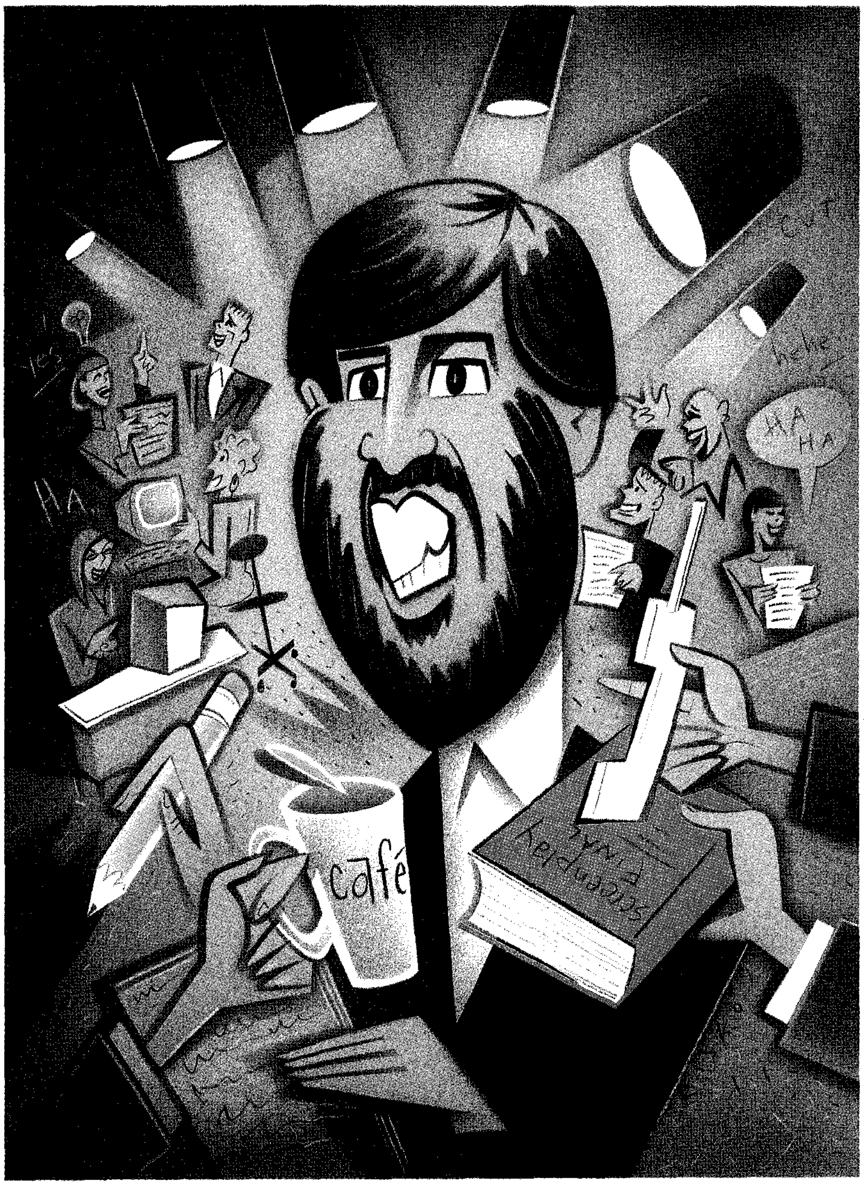
To keep his assembly line humming, Bass works an average of fourteen hours a day, seven days a week. Michael Ovitz, his former agent, told me, "Creativity is usually part discipline and part undiscipline. Ron is all discipline. He basically took the creative process and channelled an intensity into it that is mind-boggling." Al Franken, the writer and actor, stayed in Bass's house a few years ago while the two men were writing "When a Man Loves a Woman," which starred Andy Garcia and Meg Ryan as a couple confronting the wife's alcoholism. "At 3 A.M. there'd be this knock on my door," Franken recalls, "and I'd go, 'Ah, fuck.' But I'd get up immediately, because he's such a taskmaster. If I went to the bathroom, he'd say, 'Think while you're in there, and have a good line when you get back.'" To his many collaborators, Bass is Sergeant Screenplay: *On the double, go, go, go! You weasel, you call yourself a writer? Drop and give me twenty pages!*

Four or five projects constantly demand Bass's attention, particularly now that he is in the middle of a three-year deal with Sony, which pays him upward of ten million dollars a year to write only for that studio and to consult on its troubled scripts. John Calley, the chairman of Sony Pictures Entertainment, told me, "Ron is a combination artist and air-traffic controller, saying, 'I can get you into Kennedy, but only between nine-fifteen and nine-eighteen.'"

When Bass and I met at his Cape

Cod-style house, it was at mutually inconvenient times—Sunday morning at seven-thirty was a regular compromise. We would sit in the living room in armchairs slipcovered in pale-brown linen as the first light spilled through the bay window, and Bass would watch as I sleepily picked at a catered platter of bagels and fruit. Like a boa constrictor, he eats infrequently, usually only at dinnertime. Fear and desire, he says, are all the fuel he needs.

Fear is a big engine for Bass. Although he has homes in Brentwood, in the Napa Valley, and on Central Park West; although he buys his suits at Wilkes Bashford in San Francisco and regularly flies first class to Paris, he worries that it could all vanish at any moment. With unexpected shyness, he told me, "I always feel that someday they're going to find out that I'm just a little kid in an adult suit, and they're going to put me in my room."



"People are embarrassed by big emotion," Bass says. "But there are moments that need to be as big and juicy and on the nose as they can be."

ROBERT RISKO

So Bass is obsessive about maintaining control, and he is careful never to disappoint. "I began with certain business ideas from my experience as an entertainment lawyer," he said, referring to his previous career of seventeen years. "The powerlessness of the screenwriter is what makes him unhappy, and that powerlessness comes from the fact that he is always waiting for everybody else. But the only person who *doesn't* have to wait is the writer—you can always write. My technique for success was I'd spend six hours a day writing and eight hours preparing the next story, or two stories. People who finish a script and have this huge sense of giving birth and say, 'I'll go to Hawaii'—it's amazing how many people do that.

"I had a ritual," he continued, "where I would write 'Fade to black. Roll in credits' and close that notebook and immediately pick up the notebook for the next movie, write 'Interior. Raymond's Room. Night' or whatever, and make myself start writing the first scene. It all continues: comedy, drama, buddy film, caper—it's all one story, really, the story of who we are and how we relate and how we get it wrong."

Bass's Team helps him sidestep many of the screenwriter's other occupational hazards. Like all writers, he always hated getting notes from studio "D girls," or development underlings, who had taken Robert McKee's famous "Story" class on the basics of screenwriting and would simply repeat its jargon: "Could we make the protagonist more proactive?" "We need the inciting incident higher in the arc."

Bass recalls, "They'd hit you with this eight-page memo and see what happened. It's called 'throwing the meat under the door.'" Five years ago, feeling the need for more control, and wanting to be even more productive, Bass hired a woman named Jane Rusconi as a sort of in-house D girl. The other five members of the Team were brought in one by one as Bass's workload increased. Three of them are upbeat young women—they're called "the Ronettes" by some of Bass's friends—who had worked in the entertainment and publishing industries. One is highly efficient, one is shy and graceful, and one is the class clown. (Another Team member, the youngest, was killed last fall in an accident.) The other two members are Bass's younger sister, Diane, a psychiatric social worker who advises him on family dynamics and autism, and David Field, a soulful man who was once an executive at United Artists.

In their enthusiasm for Bass and his Stakhanovite regimen, the Team is like one of those scruffy gangs in the movies which battle impossible odds: they are the Magnificent Six, the Dirty Half-Dozen, the Bass News Bears. The younger women work seven days a week, from their homes, and are on call should Bass phone them early on a Sunday morning to brainstorm ideas for his current script. Their most basic work is research: get

"Am I too late to loot the dead?"

• •

me the perfect wedding poem; get me the names of all the machinery in play during a bypass operation; get me trivia about the 1927 New York Yankees.

Then comes a two- or three-day outlining marathon in Bass's living room, with the Team poised on armchairs, eating catered sandwiches, as Bass paces hungrily, saying, "The first scene is this, the second . . . ," performing dialogue in a white heat, speaking as the characters, dealing with the Team's objections as if in a dream, unable to remember later who said what.

The next day, Bass and the Team page-budget each of the script's sixty-odd scenes, debating whether a given scene requires three and a half pages or can be dispatched in three. Then everyone goes home and sends Bass a series of faxes on the blocking for each scene, containing ideas, pratfalls, bits of business, "beats," or "turns." He expects specifics: "If someone says, 'Then this gay guy comes out and makes this really swishy, biting comment'—that's assigning me to do all the work. I mean, any idea what that comment might be?" After he completes a scene and his personal assistant types it, she faxes it to everyone, and they call or fax Bass—and one another—with their responses.

"My guess is that if I wrote six scripts a year before, with the Team I write seven," Bass says. "At two million dollars, that extra script brings in more money than my payroll costs, so it all makes economic sense. But the huge advantage is in the quality." As a rule, if three Team members don't understand a line or a character's motivation, it gets fixed. Bass says, "Even an awful, inarticulate suggestion will make me think, Gee, I didn't realize George sounds anti-abortion, or, She really *should* have known he was fooling around, and I'm going to change scenes fourteen to eighteen to have her be aware of that, as a secret. Every scene, every word, is more polished now."

Bass's setup is not just a writers' workshop but an independent production house, named Predawn Productions, with Bass himself as the product. The presence of the Team allows him to assign novels to be "covered" as possible stories for adaptation, allows him to hop from one fully prepared project to another, to sail in and give notes on other Sony projects—even as he receives fewer outside notes himself. Before, he proposed; now he can dispose.

BECAUSE of his productivity and his clout, Bass provokes enormous envy in the screenwriting community. Bass's friend Jerry Zucker, who co-produced "My Best Friend's Wedding," says, "You're on this pump cart, and you see someone zooming by on the next track with a locomotive, and you're bound to be bitter." There is a widespread assumption in Hollywood that Bass's Team writes some of his scripts for him outright, with Bass simply signing his name and collecting the fee. "Everyone knows that Ron has these development mice write his movies for him," one prominent screenwriter told me. Babaloo Mandel, who, with his partner Lowell Ganz, has written numerous hit comedies, including "City Slickers" and "A League of Their Own," describes his vision of the Bass system: "Picture a lot of Asians wearing coveralls tied to typewriters, and Bass shouting 'Where's that scene!' or pointing to the different scripts: 'No! No! Yes! Yes! Brilliant! Now, on to the phony Louis Vuitton bags!' "

Bass is frustrated by these perceptions. "*I don't cheat*," he says fiercely. "As much as I adore the girls, they can't do what I do. If they could write a script that would sell for two million dollars, I don't think they'd be working for me." After talking extensively with Bass and with the members of his Team, and reading many of his scripts and drafts, I am satisfied that the rumor is false. The Team suggests reams of jokes and plot points and "temp" dialogue that he may sometimes incorporate, but Bass does the actual writing alone, in longhand, with his special pencils.

The legend of Bass's script factory will be hard to eradicate, though, because his system both challenges and reinforces certain core screenwriting myths. First, writers are supposed to be solitary and weak. At Columbia, during the thirties, the studio's founder, Harry Cohn, would invite a new writer to lunch in the executive dining room and seat him, with elaborate ceremony, in a special chair—which promptly collapsed as everyone roared with laughter. "It's a 'Story of O' scenario," says Stephen Schiff, who wrote the screenplay for "The Deep End of the Ocean" and for the recent "Lolita." "The writer is the most wooed person in Hollywood—then, as soon as the story is extracted from him, he's lashed to a post and beaten senseless." So when producers see Bass arrive for meetings with a woman who carries a laptop to take notes, they feel obscurely threatened. A writer with six assistants seems as strange as a hermit with six butlers.

The idea of a "screenplay factory," however, is not entirely new. In the thirties and forties, Ben Hecht, who used an Oscar as a doorstop, had a stable of junior writers who turned his treatments into scripts, and in the fifties the Oscar-winner Philip Yordan hired at least five surrogate writers. The practice continues today. Lowell Ganz, of Ganz and Mandel, says, "We don't farm stuff out—if it's going to be crap, we'd like it to be our crap—but people say everyone does it."

Dennis Klein, a screenwriter who did aboveboard script doctoring on "Cocoon" and "Look Who's Talking," says he has worked as an unofficial ghostwriter—that is, secretly contracted himself to the screenwriter—at least a dozen times, including a stint on a film that is one of the top-ten money-makers of all time. "I come in when the writer of record is burned out, blocked, or confused," Klein told me. "But the writer can't tell that to the studio—for the same reason that if you're wandering around lost in the desert you don't tie a piece of fried chicken to your head." It is fitting that a writing community that is often burned out, blocked, or confused should project its shame about ghostwriting onto Ron Bass, who is never burned out, blocked, or confused.

But the chief reason the factory rumor will endure is that no one who matters really cares who writes Bass's scripts, as long as they're good. The movie industry is a business of results. "I suppose rough carpentry is being done by Ron's colleagues, that he then rewrites," Sony's John Calley says. "The astonishing amount of output suggests that he can't do it all himself. He's responsible for quality control and management, and that's what we're buying. If a director is really his cameraman and his editor, if they're the only reason he's great—well, who cares? As long as the movies work out."

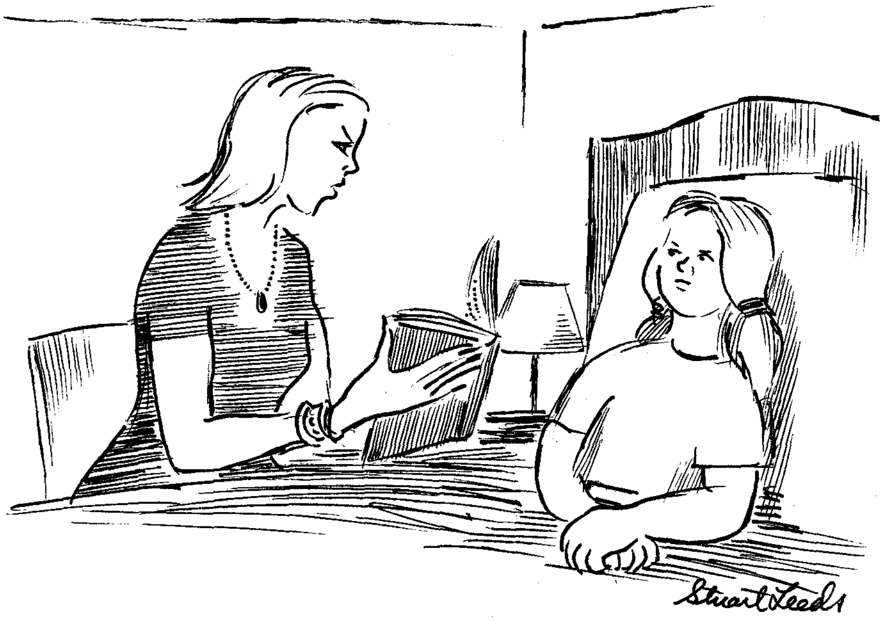
WHY do Ron Bass scripts command two million dollars? Because they work. After at least five other writers had tackled the story, it was Bass's draft of "Stepmom" which introduced the crucial third-act conflict—a battle between the cancer-ridden mother and the father's fiancée over how the daughter should deal with her churlish ex-boyfriend. Bass's draft persuaded Julia Roberts and Susan Sarandon to commit to the film, making it a "go." Similarly, John Calley told me, "When Steven Spielberg expressed interest in 'Memoirs of a Geisha,' our ability to make Ron available basically locked Steven in, because there was a very short list of writers he would work with. Getting 'Memoirs' with Spielberg—that alone practically justifies the money we're paying Ron."

Bass's name is bankable: it reassures actors and directors and makes him their "comfort guy." He has an intuitive sense for what a mass audience will want to see. The playwright Moss Hart called this kind of gift "the Woolworth's touch." Like the Midas touch, it can be a mixed blessing. "The studios that hire Ron Bass hire him to deliver hundred-million-dollar movies," Bass's attorney, Alan Wertheimer, says. "That's where the bar is set." Bass lives and dies by the box-office numbers on opening Friday. "If 'Entrapment' does only two million and it cost seventy," he says, "you want to jump off a bridge." (The movie actually did quite well.)

Bass is that key figure in any successful creative system: the eighty-per-cent man. By applying a Mir cosmonaut's ingenuity, a televangelist's empathy for his audience's dreams, and a coal miner's capacity for backbreaking labor, Bass can take a film eighty per cent of the way to excellence. But unless someone, usually the director or the actors, is inspired to add the final twenty per cent, the film will probably become one of those airplane movies you half watch without renting the headset. (Often, that "addition" is actually a subtraction, a roughing up of Bass's crisp geometries.) In "My Best Friend's Wedding" many of the funniest lines and scenes—that crucial twenty per cent—were the work of the director, P. J. Hogan, and Rupert Everett, who played Julia Roberts's gay friend George. Bass objected to Hogan's insertion of a sing-along scene, in which the characters suddenly start crooning "I Say a Little Prayer" and waving giant lobster-claw oven mitts in a crowded restaurant. He worried that it would stop the movie and break the "reality cover"; instead, it was the film's goofy highlight.

Bass is known for his way with structure. "Some writers can give you dialogue," Michael Ovitz told me. "Some can give you characters, some can give you structure, and very few can give you all three. Ron can give you structure." Bass's dialogue is skillful enough, actually, but a viable structure is what galvanizes producers and directors and propels a movie into production. The repartee, the characters' back stories, even the vision, can always be fixed later by other writers.

He can "crack" almost any story into



"What's your problem, Chloe? My client loved this presentation."

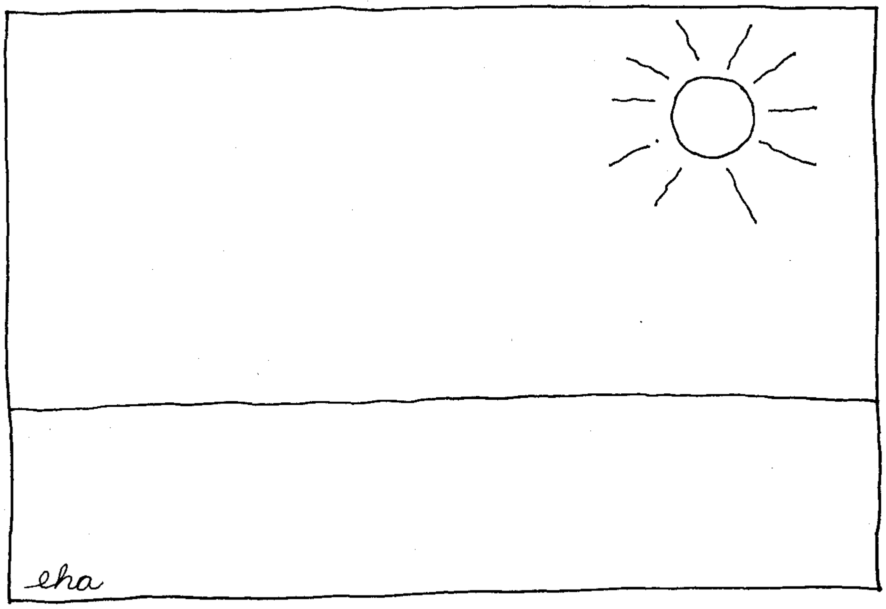
the conventional, Aristotelian three acts, with a constant ratcheting up of the action and the stakes, so that expectations are raised (first act), confounded (second act), and then resolved in a mildly surprising way (third act). Arcs are completed, journeys are rewarded, and there is almost never an unjustified moment, a scene that unfolds for its own sake.

Bass's stories are linear, and what's at stake is explicit. In the first three minutes of "My Best Friend's Wedding," the Julia Roberts character talks about her best friend, Michael: "We've seen each other through everything—losing jobs, losing parents, losing lovers. We've travelled all over. Best times of my life." Then she gets on the phone with Michael, who tells her he's about to be married and says, "I'm scared. I need you. If you can't come and hold my hand, I'll never get through this." Cut to Roberts heading to the airport, frantically explaining, "I've got exactly four days to break up a wedding, steal the bride's fella—and I haven't one clue how to do it." What follows is a tour de force of plotting, as Bass toys with our expectations of whether Roberts will get the guy.

Studio executives love Bass because his scripts speak directly to them. In "Mozart and the Whale," Bass's stage directions help readers visualize "Donald trying to make the bed. Whatever he pulls, nothing stays even. Trust me. It's funny." Bass uses rhetorical snippets and quirky punctuation in his asides ("Oh." Or "A beat." Or "I'll. Just. Bet"), both to slow the pace of the dialogue and to suggest a scene's desired impact. "Ron is very skillful at showing you what you're going to be seeing *and* feeling," Gareth Wigan, the co-vice-chairman of Columbia TriStar Motion Picture Group, says. "Movie scripts are usually likened to blueprints, but most people need a model to imagine a house. Ron's scripts provide both the blueprint and the model."

Bass, however, values his architectonic skills less than his ability to go "soft," to give a film "heart." There is a screenwriter's term called "petting the dog": to show that a character is a good fellow, you have him pet a dog. Bass's characters live at the petting zoo. His scripts are necklaces of pearly moments: fathomless whispers, last breaths being taken, kisses that last a lifetime, soft-spoken insights, heroic speeches, dizzying smiles, manly handclasps, and hugs of warm and enfolding sisterhood. "Ron has a high-concept commercial gift for involving you in a communal moviegoing experience," says Hannah Shakespeare, a member of his Team. Less optimistically, Kenneth Turan, the film critic of the Los Angeles *Times*, once wrote that Bass "seems never to have met a tear he didn't like." Bass was stung by the line, but he refuses to repent. "If I cry writing a scene, you're going to cry," he says. "My cry meter is acute."

When DIRT Ruled the EARTH



Bass's style owes a debt to Spielberg, and one of his crucial lessons in audience gratification came from the master himself, on the 1988 film "Rain Man." Bass had written Dustin Hoffman's character, Raymond, as a sweet retarded man, ignoring Hoffman's suggestion that he be autistic. Spielberg—who at that point was planning to direct the film—sat Bass down and, as Bass recalls, gently said, "Dustin was right and you were wrong. Want to know why?"

"Sure," Bass said.

"This is a love story between two brothers. What's the most important thing in any love story? It's the obstacle—what is it that keeps these two people who are supposed to be in love from being in love until the end?"

"Right . . ." Bass said cautiously.

"If the guy is retarded and runs around holding somebody's hand, what's the obstacle? Just that Tom Cruise is a hard case? You know Tom's going to soften, and you can see the end of the movie coming at you down Fifth Avenue. But if the guy's an autistic, an incredible pain in the ass, he hates people—you've got a difficult love story."

"Yeah, right!" Bass thought for a minute. "But maybe it's too much of an obstacle—maybe the audience won't love this guy."

"Ah, it's all in the casting," Spielberg said. "Dustin can play it completely legit, totally autistic. He doesn't have to cheat, and the more obnoxious he is the more you're going to love him. We solved it in the casting."

In a Bass script, even more than in a Spielberg movie, the love is always on the page. "I'm not much of a less-is-more guy," Bass says. "All the adulation that's paid to minimalism is frequently because people are embarrassed by big emotion. It's a conceit in art: show it, don't say it. It's *so* much more exquisite if you don't quite *do* it. But there are moments that need to be as big and juicy and on the nose as they can be."

Bass reveals his characters' inner lives in what amounts to a group-therapy dynamic—his movies are full of the lingo of self-help. His characters always gain the insight and muster the courage to voice the passionate avowals and confessions we wish our friends and lovers would make to us. These final-act turns revolve upon what Bass calls "a self-esteem point" and a "point-of-view point." A self-esteem point occurs when someone takes responsibility for himself, discovers the self-loathing that has been making a relationship dysfunctional. "In 'My Best Friend's Wedding,' when Julia Roberts has to get on her knees and say to Dermot Mulroney, 'I'm pond scum,' that's the most important scene in the movie, because she genuinely seeks forgiveness and wants to change," Bass says.

A point-of-view point occurs when a character can step out of himself, gaze into another person's eyes, and know how that person feels. In Bass's original draft of "Snow Falling on Cedars," his adaptation of David Guterson's novel about a murder trial in the Pacific Northwest, Carl and Kabuo, who have been fighting over the rights to seven acres of land, come to a rapprochement by discussing their separate experiences in the Second World War:

> KABUO
>
> I killed men who looked just like you, pig-fed German bastards. And their blood don't wash off so easy. . . . So don't talk to me about Japs, you big Nazi son of a bitch.
>
> Carl laughs. And Kabuo chuckles, right along with him. Having kept his poker face the longer.
>
> CARL
>
> I am a bastard. I'm a big Hun Nazi son of a bitch. And I still got your bamboo fishing rod.
>
> . . . The hands grip. And they hold. And the length of this clasp, and the straightness of their gaze, and the silence of the moment. Wash years away.

None of this made it into the finished film, but it is a style of jocular poignancy that we recognize from A.T.&T. commercials and "Up Close and Personal" sports profiles and after-school specials and Norman Rockwell oils: love alone is never enough, but love and understanding, dished up with a sprinkling of humor, win every time. It is this message that makes a Bass script so familiar, so cheering, so like a cup of cocoa.

In his rejected draft of "The Bridges of Madison County," Bass notably departed from Robert James Waller's novel. He had the adulterous lovers, played by Meryl Streep and Clint Eastwood, reunite after her husband's death. "I wrote a really lovely scene where her husband is dying, about how much she really did love him, and he sort of knew there'd been this affair, and he was grateful to her for sticking by him," Bass says. "Then, two or three years later, she gets off a train in Kerala, India, a rickety little depot, and there her lover is." He struggles to get his voice under control: "I'm crying even as I'm telling it to you. They are both many years older, they walk slowly together and lift their hands to just touch each other, and you fade out." His eyes are red. "It's very on the nose, my style. But why not? Why should we make a story that says that love can't be, that dreams can't come true, and that loyalty and integrity, which she had, can't be rewarded?"

"The country Grandpa came from was a stinking hellhole of unspeakable poverty where everyone was always happy."

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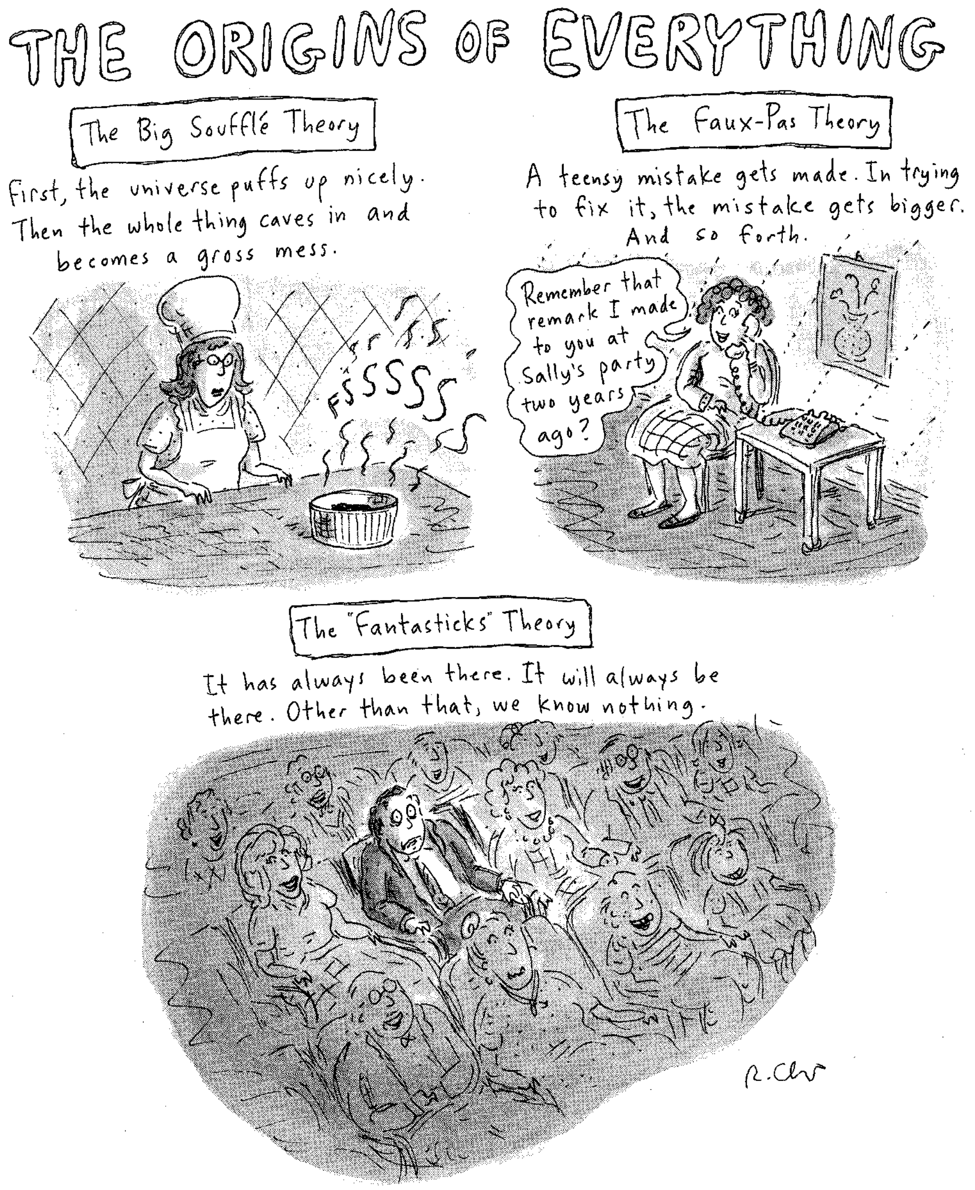
"I LOVE the fact that I'm scared every morning," Bass said one day last year. He was sitting beneath an awning twined with red bougainvillea close by his pool, which is encircled by four groups of cast-iron tables and chairs. Some mornings, he works here, shifting from table to table to track the light, like the shadow of a sundial. "Fear is the most valuable ally I've got. It stands between me and going downhill."

He lowered his voice. "It began with being bedridden as a kid. Not being normal has no upside to a kid—it means *inferior*." Bass grew up in Los Angeles near Third and Fairfax, a half block from the Writers Guild; he was an invalid from age three to age seven, and he remained in bed much of the time until he was eleven. His high fevers, nausea, respiratory problems, and stomach pains were never satisfactorily diagnosed, but doctors at the Mayo Clinic said that he was the youngest ulcer victim they had ever seen.

"I know there was a lot of pain, but I've forgotten it, mostly," Bass said. "And I actually remember the time in bed fondly." Because he was rarely able to sleep at night, he'd put his ear to the radio or read instead, tearing through Dostoyevsky and Faulkner at an age when most children are tackling "The Chronicles of Narnia." "What I remember is the comfort and security of being alone with my imagination, and how it raced from these books, which had me in awe—I knew I could never write something as great as 'The Idiot.' "

A close friend of Bass's told me, "I think his Rosebud is the time in bed. He was so precocious that he was treated as a genius by his parents, but he needed to be loved. So I think he just shut down, psychosomatically, just said no. And now he's surrounded himself with this Team, so he can get the same attention. Just as in his movies he's accused of being manipulative, of wanting that love. It eases the sadness in him."

Bass's writing career started early,


THE ORIGINS OF EVERYTHING
The Big Soufflé Theory
First, the universe puffs up nicely. Then the whole thing caves in and becomes a gross mess.
FSSSSS
The Faux-Pas Theory
A teensy mistake gets made. In trying to fix it, the mistake gets bigger. And so forth.
Remember that remark I made to you at Sally's party two years ago?
The "Fantasticks" Theory
It has always been there. It will always be there. Other than that, we know nothing.

and then stopped dead. As a freshman at U.C.L.A., he showed his novel "Voleur" to his English teacher, whom he adored. "She said, 'Oh, Ronnie, you have such talent,'" Bass recalls. "But she also said it wouldn't get published—I wasn't really good, in other words, just the best in freshman English. So I went home and burned the novel in a metal bowl. It was very dramatic and self-pitying." Then Bass took the advice of his father—who quit college during the Depression and became an automobile-seat-cover entrepreneur—and turned decidedly practical.

After graduating from Harvard Law School, Bass made the choice to go into entertainment law, "so I could be close to the people I wasn't good enough to be one of," and soon emerged as a brilliant, relentless negotiator at a leading Los Angeles firm. But his marriage, to Gail Weinstein, was falling apart, and by 1976 it was over. Bass says, "When Gail left, I thought I was never going to love again, that my life was broken. I had spent a lot of my childhood alone, and I didn't want to be alone."

Then things began to change. Bass went into therapy, four times a week, and fell in love with Christine Steinmann, who would become his second wife. He turned to "Voleur" again, and it was published by Jove, in 1978, as "The Perfect Thief." He followed that up with two spy novels, having discovered that genre fiction sold better. His third book was optioned by a well-known producer, Jonathan Sanger, and Bass asked to write the screenplay. "Code Name: Emerald," which starred Ed Harris and Max von Sydow, went straight to video. "It was about a German-American undercover in Paris on D Day, but really it was about *people*," Bass says. "They, of course, made it a World War II movie. I heard it was rewritten by seven other writers. Seven. How can you be a lawyer for seventeen years in the movie business and see a thousand writers get screwed, and then you're *shocked* when it happens to you?"

In 1984, after writing screenplays at night for two years, Bass finally quit his day job when Fox signed him to write two scripts at a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars each. They were never produced, but soon afterward Bass's "Black Widow," about a female serial killer, came out, and then "Gardens of Stone," concerning life in the home guard during the Vietnam War. Suddenly, he was a middle-aged golden boy who had ideas for everyone in town. Early on, he set up a meeting with Gary Lucchesi, an executive at TriStar.

"So tell me your pitch," Lucchesi said.

"I've got seventeen pitches," Bass replied.

"Um, well, tell me your favorite."

"They're all my favorites!"

Bass developed an innovative system whereby he would make "blind" deals with studios to write a screenplay, about a subject to be mutually agreed on, in a narrow time slot as much as two years in the future. He would promise, "I'll turn it in next July 20th," and it would arrive to the day.

He became known as someone who loved collaboration, particularly with those above him on the food chain. "Ron's available to a good idea," Andy Garcia told me. "He embraces the actors, he's in the trenches with you." Contrarily, and particularly to those below him on the food chain, he developed a reputation as an enormous pain in the neck. One of his former agents calls him "this anal guy who goes off, becomes a wild diva in lawyer's clothing: 'I just got notes from so-and-so,' he'd say, 'and I can't *be-*

lieve . . .' " Another agent shudders as he recalls Bass berating him so fiercely over the car phone about a botched screen credit that "I had to pull over because I thought I was going to throw up."

The producer Jerry Bruckheimer, who worked with Bass on "Dangerous Minds" and "Swing Vote," a television movie starring Andy Garcia, says, "Ron is very argumentative on every single point, fighting tooth and nail and explaining why a change in the first act will destroy two beats in the third act. He'll say, 'I'll do it, but it'll ruin the movie.' The same emotion he puts into pulling heartstrings he uses to become the litigator for these strong women he's written, to defend their place in these women's weepies. He can reduce studio executives to tears." One way or another, Bass leaves people crying.

MOST afternoons, Bass can be found by the pool in front of Jane Rusconi's ranch house, in Sullivan Canyon. Rusconi has three dogs and boards five horses, and in this setting Bass seems almost outdoorsy—he carries a walking stick as he paces around, writing. Rusconi, a thirtyish woman in the Meryl Streep mold, remains first among equals on the Team; she and Bass often write TV movie scripts together, and he has his own phone line at her house.

One recent afternoon at Rusconi's house, she came out with a plate of chocolate-chip cookies for Bass. He grinned, then declined: "As you know, I'm on a diet."

"You need them," she said. He took a cookie. Sometimes she can even convince him to have a bit of lunch. They have an appealing friendship: when she drives them back from meetings, he will nod off in the middle of a sentence, one of his notorious sleep-deprived blackouts. Rusconi will nudge him: "You were asleep."

"I was not!"

"You were snoring."

After Rusconi herded the dogs indoors, Bass and I started talking about how his colleagues view his system. I mentioned that among other screenwriters there is a feeling that he and his Team fit in too neatly at Sony, and that by becoming what Bass himself proudly calls "a quasi-studio executive and loyalist" he has deserted his peers.

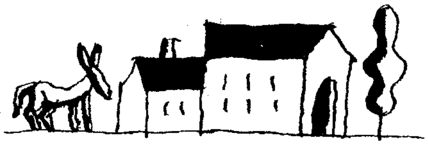
I read Bass an observation made by Robin Swicord, the screenwriter of "Little Women": "Ron has applied the model of the law office to the for-hire writer at a time when everything in the film business has become corporatized. Ron's model is high-volume—he can turn out many more screenplays than most of us can. He can fit the bill in terms of what the market is asking for. The studios aren't looking for a vision—they're looking for product."

There was a pause. "Oh, that's a shame," Bass said softly. "It's sad when people who you like and respect don't respect you. 'Product,' like we're stamping out sausage? It really does hurt my feelings, because when somebody says your work is just product, that means *you're* just product." He looked crushed.

I no longer had the heart to ask him for his reaction to a similar remark made by a member of his Team, who told me, unprompted, "I keep thinking that Ron's three-act structure is like sausage casing, and our job is to push the grist of the research through it, to find ideas, beats, spices to put in there."

Bass recovered countenance, but for the next few days he kept making pointed references to "product" and to being "on the nose," muttering, "Well, *Robin* might not think much of this idea I had, but . . ." Being liked is important to Bass, and he reveals this every time he tips a bellboy twenty dollars. When he wrote "Failure to Communicate" with Rusconi, in 1994, John Calley hated their take on a James Bond-like action adventure, and killed the project. "I was in a funk for months," Bass said. Over Calley's protests, he returned the studio's money, as he has done several times when he feels he has failed. He told me, "If Amy Pascal"—a Columbia executive—"doesn't like it, or Julia Roberts doesn't like it, even if strangers don't like it, boy, do I feel like a dog. I can't work harder than I do, and I can't write better than I write, so when they say, 'This is bad,' I just die. Because it means: 'You have an ugly baby.' "

Bass is passionate about his work, but he's most passionate about making it work. The screenwriter Joe Eszterhas has written that Bass is too complaisant, too eager to go along with what the studio wants: "How can you believe in any of your ideas if you are pitching eight of them?"



Bass sees this issue quite differently, believing that a writer who insists on telling a particular story at a particular time isn't a writer at all. "He's really a philosopher," Bass says. "The whole 'I don't want to be a whore, I want to be true to my own vision' yada yada—that's bullshit. That's the debate I went through when I was a beginner, and it made me very ineffective. We're in a collaborative medium, and the screenwriter's job is to find the change that everyone can agree on. You want your original vision? Go home and write down your thoughts and publish them as a novel, or just look at the pages on weekends and feel good about yourself."

Bass has even learned to welcome the public's "notes." "I started out, like every other writer, hating previews," he said. " 'You're going to let three hundred clowns in a mall in Woodland Hills tell us what to do?' Boy, was I wrong. You can preview a movie in ten places and the scores will be the same. And, by definition, *they're not wrong*. You sit with the director and people who are saying, 'Well, they're dolts, and isn't the film for us?' And the answer is no, the audience aren't dolts, and no, we didn't make the film for us—that's not what somebody spent eighty million dollars on."

At previews, viewers rate a picture as excellent, very good, good, fair, and poor, and the combined percentage of "excellents" and "very goods," known as "the top two boxes," is tallied on a hundred-point scale. The resulting number carries considerable weight. Bass says, "If you have a forty-six-second walk-up where someone's getting out of a cab and ringing a doorbell, the director will have all these reasons why these beauty shots are artistic. If the picture is scoring in the eighties, then the scene is giving the picture 'air,' or room to breathe. But if the movie is in the sixties—and if it is, I'm scared—the scene is what we call 'shoe leather,' and it's got to go."

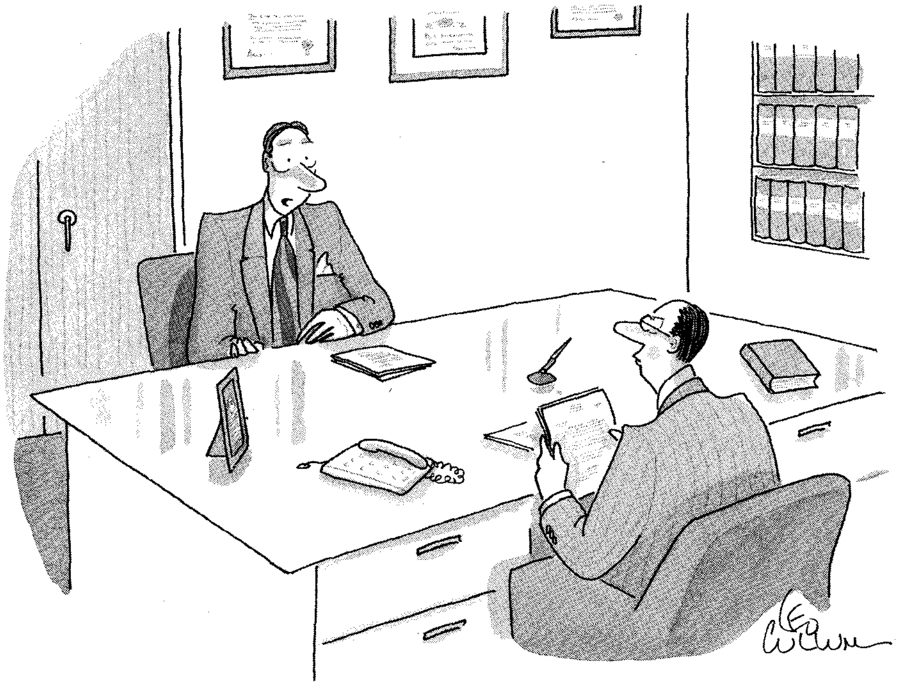
Preview audiences for "My Best Friend's Wedding" felt that Julia Roberts's character hadn't atoned for trying to steal Cameron Diaz's fiancé. "Previously, when Julia went to find Cameron in the bathroom she made up some story about having kissed him—she was lying,” Jerry Zucker, the film’s co-producer, says. “We reshot it so she says to Cameron, ‘He doesn’t love me, he loves you.’ She has tears in her eyes, it’s hard for her—the audience buys it.”

The test audience also hated that Julia Roberts ended up at the wedding in the arms of a brand-new love interest—people wanted to see more of Rupert Everett as her gay friend George. “Ron did a great repair job,” John Calley says. (Bass rewrote the ending so that Everett arrives as a surprise and Roberts dances with him.) “The audience told us that the relationship between Rupert and Julia was what mattered. They told us not to worry about setting her up, because they weren’t worried.” Clearly, Julia Roberts—Julia Roberts, after all—was eventually going to be able to find love with a heterosexual man.

In Hollywood, the audience ends up as the ultimate studio boss. Bass argues that “it’s not that there’s good stuff, which never sells any tickets because it’s so good, and then there’s commercial stuff, which panders to everybody’s lowbrow taste, and that’s where you make money. Usually, something is successful because people like the thing that is good about it. Of course, ‘Gods and Monsters’ will never sell as many tickets as ‘Armageddon.’ Those are different markets. Within each market, though, everybody wants quality.”

But quality in the blockbuster market, where Bass usually works, is often gauged by a film’s profits. In that market, idiosyncrasy of vision is not encouraged. The very qualities that help Bass to get his movies made—his reputation for providing a structure that others can play around with, his eagerness to please—often conspire to defeat his ultimate hopes. In “Stepmom,” for instance, Bass’s themes were interpreted very broadly by the director, Christopher Columbus. Bass admits that “some of my humor is cheesy and cornball, reaching out to be popular,” and that “the ending is a ten-handkerchief affair, though I think it earned that.” (“O.K.,” he adds, “it’s not Shakespeare,” and, “O.K., so don’t give us an Academy Award.”) But he still believes that some of his self-esteem-affirming vision shines through.

John Calley waves away the very idea that a screenwriter could impress his voice and vision upon the public. “Good scripts resemble one another, and not even the Writers Guild can distinguish one style from another,” he says, drinking beef tea in his huge office and gazing out benignly at his private sunporch. “Everybody is rewritten by everybody so it flows and is intelligent. It’s just not a literary medium—it’s a suggestion of a visual medium, and as such wildly inadequate.” Studio executives approach mainstream movies as they would a stew, with a battery of cooks constantly tasting from the pot as the refrigerator is emptied of leftovers. After the “Stepmom” preview, Calley told Bass, “Great film. We didn’t even need the cancer.”



“Remember when I said I was going to be honest with you, Jeff? That was a big, fat lie.”

“THE Ron Bass story is wonderfully instructive,” the screenwriter Dennis Klein says, “because it reveals the thudding dead-endedness of the job of screenwriter—a eunuch who delivers Cokes and pizza to the lush villa of the actual moviemakers, whose orgy he glimpses through billowing curtains.”

It turns out that even Ron Bass, the two-billion-dollar man, has to suffer the routine indignities of the screenwriter. Last spring, Bass finished up “The System” as a buddy film for Will Smith, but Smith told him the characters seemed too smart, and the project was put on hold. Bass then turned to “Bad Boys 2,” a sequel to the Martin Lawrence cop caper, and suddenly, he told me worriedly, “here’s Martin in the hospital with his accident, or illness, or whatever we’re calling it.” (The erratic star had gone into a three-day coma after jogging while wearing heavy clothing.) “Passion of Mind,” from a Bass idea dear to his heart, was supposed to open last fall, but its release kept being delayed. “Paramount Classics is waiting for Demi Moore to be able to publicize the movie,” Bass said gloomily. “She’s the star, so we sit around waiting and coaxing.”

He was eager to tackle a new draft of “Memoirs of a Geisha” for Steven Spielberg, but first the director had to make “Minority Report,” with Tom Cruise, and that couldn’t start until the actor had finished “Mission: Impossible 2,” which had run well over schedule in Australia. In the meantime, Billy Bob Thornton seemed likely to sign on as the director of “The Shipping News,” another Bass adaptation. Bass knew that Thornton did a lot of his own writing, and might just toss Bass’s draft, of which he was extremely proud. “Will I get to meet the great man?” Bass wondered. “I may be hanging with Billy Bob, or I may be fired and just see him at the première.”

“Couldn’t you just call him and ask about his plans?” I asked.

“Call him?” Bass said incredulously.

"Am I the only guy at this table who goes back to when this stuff was two hundred and fifty dollars a bottle?"

• •

"Oh, sure! I'd hear from the studio so fast—'You did what!' "

Then there was "Snow Falling on Cedars." Bass's adaptation of David Guterson's novel attracted Scott Hicks, who directed "Shine." Bass, in his role as producer, approved of Hicks's hiring, because the director said he loved the script—which departed significantly from the book. "To draw viewers into an adaptation, where you have only three per cent as much time as a novel," Bass says, "you need to make the characters sparklier, more accessible—anything that helps the audience connect. David Guterson didn't like that at all. He saw the characters as more sombre and internal, and he persuaded Scott."

Hicks took over the writing—he and Bass ended up sharing credit—and stripped out fifty pages of Bass's draft, including all the voice-over and most of the witty banter. Then he filmed a gorgeous but inert movie built around confusing multiple flashbacks and images of foggy fog and snowy snow and glittering salmon flopping on boat decks. "The film is so lyrical and challenging that people are going to say, 'That's really groundbreaking for you, Ron!' " Bass says, laughing ruefully.

Even the Team, the facilitators of Bass's polished and accessible style, sometimes strikes him as a doubtful bargain. Now and then, he recognizes that he has simply internalized the chorus of editors who reshape every Hollywood script, as well as given himself six more people to please. He told me, "I do wonder, would I be happier if I said, 'O.K., Team, goodbye,' and I went to Maui and wrote twelve first drafts a year, from the heart. Get out of the producer business, the constructive and responsible business. Maybe have some people around just to generate ideas for me, help me figure them out, and then just roll and roll and roll."

I couldn't help smiling at this busman's holiday, which sounds almost exactly like his current life, plus pineapples. Bass caught the grin, and returned it. "I'm also dying to go back to novels, to have something that would appear as I originally wrote it," he said. "The day will come when I've had enough of the tumult, and I'll really go interior and for a year I'll only write a novel." He is silent for a moment. "And three or four screenplays."

Inside his office, Bass runs his hand along the rows of screenplays on his bookshelves, absorbing memories of frustration, as if the titles, Magic Markered on the spines, were in Braille. A binder marked "Personal" lists them by year, like pressings in a vintner's catalogue: ninety-five titles in all. And so many lie undone, or redone, such as "Dangerous Minds," starring Michelle Pfeiffer as an inspirational teacher, which was entirely "re-dialogued," as they say, by Elaine May. "Here's my 'Bridges of Madison County,' which Clint Eastwood didn't go for," Bass says. "And 'Martine,' about vampires, which is not playing at theatres near you." His voice drops, and he sounds very tired. " 'Mao,' the same, and 'Children of Angels,' which has guardian angels, like 'It's a Wonderful Life.' It's very schmaltzy and sentimental, and nobody likes it but me and my Team." He stands back, gazing up. "There's a lot of heartbreak on this shelf."

Even "Rain Man," the film that won Bass his Academy Award for screenwriting, was changed that crucial twenty per cent. Bass and Barry Levinson, the director who replaced Spielberg, disagreed about the film's last scene. As Levinson filmed it, the Dustin Hoffman character leaves on a train to return to the institution in Chicago and Tom Cruise waves from the platform, having promised to visit him soon. The moment is tender but bittersweet. "In my version," Bass said, "Tom's girlfriend is also there. They'd gotten back together, because I thought Tom deserved that for having made the journey and learned how to relate to someone. So he says goodbye to Dustin, and Dustin starts to get hysterical, really crazy, even though Tom is saying, 'I'm going to be there in two weeks.'

"As the train starts to rumble away, I have Tom looking to the girlfriend, and her eyes say 'Go!' and Tom grabs on to the handhold and swings aboard to take Dustin to Chicago. It didn't change the story at all, but it was the last image I wanted the audience to have. Was the most important truth the connection the brothers would have in the future? Or Barry's image of the lack, the connection they could never have? Both were honest. Barry's choice worked one thousand per cent, and—although this isn't why he did it—you're always going to get better reviews if you go out on the minor chord. . . ." His voice trailed off. Having reached the summit of his hopes, the very boardroom of the Dream Factory, Bass still can't make the world as cozy and consoling as he dreamed it should be, long ago in bed. He sighed. "Four hundred and fifty-eight million dollars and I don't know how many Oscars later, the writer still remembers his ending and feels it could have worked, too." ♦

LARRY GIANETTINO, "MOOSE," 1996"/RICCO/MARESCA GALLERY

FICTION

LE MOOZ

BY LOUISE ERDRICH

MARGARET had exhausted three husbands, and Nanapush outlived his six wives. They were old by the time they shacked up out in the deep bush. Besides, as Ojibweg in the last century's first decades, having starved and grieved, having seen prodigious loss and endured theft by agents of the government and *chimookomaanag* farmers, they were tired. You would think, at last, they'd just want simple comfort. Quiet. Companionship and sleep. But times did not go smoothly. Peace eluded them. For Nanapush and Margaret found a surprising heat in their hearts. Fierce and sudden, it sometimes eclipsed both age and anger with tenderness. Then, they made love with an amazed greed and purity that astounded them. At the same time, it was apt to burn out of control.

When this happened, they fought. Stinging flames of words blistered their tongues. Silence was worse. Beneath its slow-burning weight, their black looks singed. After a few days their minds shrivelled into dead coals. Some speechless nights, they lay together like logs turned completely to ash. They were almost afraid to move, lest they sift into flakes and disintegrate. It was a young love set blazing in bodies aged and overused, and sometimes it cracked them like too much fire in an old tin stove.

To survive in their marriage, they developed many strategies. For instance, they rarely collaborated on any task. Each hunted, trapped, and fished alone. They could not agree on so little a thing as how and where to set a net. The gun, which belonged to Nanapush, was never clean when it was needed. Traps rusted. It was up to Margaret to scour the rifle barrel, smoke the steel jaws. Setting snares together was impossible, for in truth they snared themselves time and again in rude opinions and mockery over where a rabbit might jump or how to set the loop. Their avoidance only hardened them in their individual ways, and so when Margaret beached their leaky old boat one morning and jumped ashore desperate for help, there was no chance of agreement.

Margaret sometimes added little Frenchisms to her Ojibwemowin, just the way the fancy-sounding wives of the French voyageurs added, like a dash of spice, random "*le*"'s and "*la*"'s. So when she banged into the cabin screaming of "le Mooz," Nanapush woke, irritated, with reproof on his lips, as he was always pleased to find some tiny fault with his beloved.

"Le Mooz! Le Mooz!" she shouted into his face. She grabbed him by the shirt so violently that he could hear the flimsy threads part.

"*Booni'ishin!*" He tried to struggle from her grip, but Margaret rapidly explained to him that she had seen a moose swimming across the lake and here were their winter's provisions, easy! With this moose meat dried and stored, they would survive. "Get up, old man!" She grabbed the gun and dragged him to the boat before he'd even mentally prepared himself to hunt moose.

Nanapush pushed off with his paddle, sulking. Besides their natural inclination to disagree, it was always the case that, if one of them was particularly intrigued by some idea, the other was sure to feel the opposite way just to polarize the situation. If Nanapush asked for maple syrup with his meat, Margaret gave him wild onion. If Margaret relished a certain color of cloth, Nanapush declared that he could not look upon that blue or red—it made him mean and dizzy. When it came to sleeping on the fancy spring bed that Margaret had bought with this year's bark money, Nanapush adored the bounce while she was stingy with it, so as not to use it up. Sometimes he sat on the bed and joggled up and down when she was gone, just to spite her. For her part, once he began craftily to ask for wild onion, she figured he'd developed a taste for it and so bargained for a small jar of maple syrup, thus beginning the obvious next stage of their contradictoriness, which was that they each asked for the opposite of what they really wanted and so got what they wanted in the end. It was confusing to their friend Father Damien, but to the two of them it brought serene harmony. So, when Margaret displayed such extreme determination in the matter of the moose that morning, not only was Nanapush feeling especially lazy but he also decided that she really meant the opposite of what she cried out, and so he dawdled with his paddle and tried to tell her a joke or two. She, however, was in dead earnest.

"Paddle! Paddle for all you're worth!" she yelled.

"Break your backs, boys, or break wind!" Nanapush mocked her.

Over the summer, as it hadn't been the proper time for telling the sacred Ojibwe *adisookaanag*, Father Damien had tried to convert Nanapush by telling as many big-fish tales as he could remember, including the ones about the fish that multiplied, the fish that swallowed Jonah. Soon, Father Damien had had to reach beyond the Bible. Nanapush's favorite was the tale of the vast infernal white fish and the maddened chief who gave chase through the upper and lower regions of the earth.

"*Gitimishk!*" Margaret nearly choked in frustration, for the moose had changed direction and they were not closing in quickly enough for her liking.

"Aye, aye, *Ahabikwe!*" shouted Nanapush, lighting his pipe as she vented her fury in deep strokes. If the truth be told, he was delighted with her anger, for when she lost control like this during the day she often lost control once the sun went down also, and he was already anticipating their pleasure.

"Use that paddle or my legs are shut to you, lazy fool!" she growled.

At that, he went to work and they quickly drew alongside the moose. Margaret steadied herself, threw a loop of strong rope around its wide, spreading antlers, and then secured the rope tightly to the front of the boat, which was something of an odd canoe, having a flat, tough bottom, a good ricing boat but not all that easy to steer.

"Now," she ordered Nanapush, "now, take up the gun and shoot! Shoot!"

But Nanapush did not. He had killed a moose this way once before in his life, and he had nothing to prove. This time, he wasn't so anxious. What was happening to them was a very old story, one handed down through generations, one that had happened to his namesake, the trickster Nanabozho. He would not kill the moose quite yet. He hefted the gun and made certain that it was loaded, and then enjoyed the free ride they were receiving.

"Let's turn him around, my adorable pigeon," he cried to his lady. "Let him tow us back home. I'll shoot him once he reaches the shallow water just before our cabin."

Margaret could not help but agree that this particular plan arrived at by her lazy husband was a good one, and so, by using more rope and hauling on first one antler and then the other with all their strength, they proceeded to turn the beast and head him in the right direction. Nanapush sat back, smoking his pipe, and relaxed once they were pointed homeward. The sun was out and the air was cool, fresh. All seemed right between the two of them now. Margaret admonished him about the tangle of fishing tackle all around his seat, and there was even affection in her voice.

"You'll poke yourself," she said, "you fool." At that moment, with the meat pulling them right up to their doorstep, she did not really even care. "I'll fry the rump steaks tonight with a little maple syrup over them," she said, her mouth watering. "Old man, you're gonna eat good! Oooh," she almost cried with appreciation, "our moose is so fat!"

"He's a fine moose," Nanapush agreed passionately. "You've got an eye, *Mindimooyenh*. He's a juicy one, our moose!"

"I'll roast his ribs, cook the fat with our beans, and keep his brains in a bucket to tan that big hide! Oooh, *ishte*, my husband, the old men are going to envy the *makizinan* that I will sew for you."

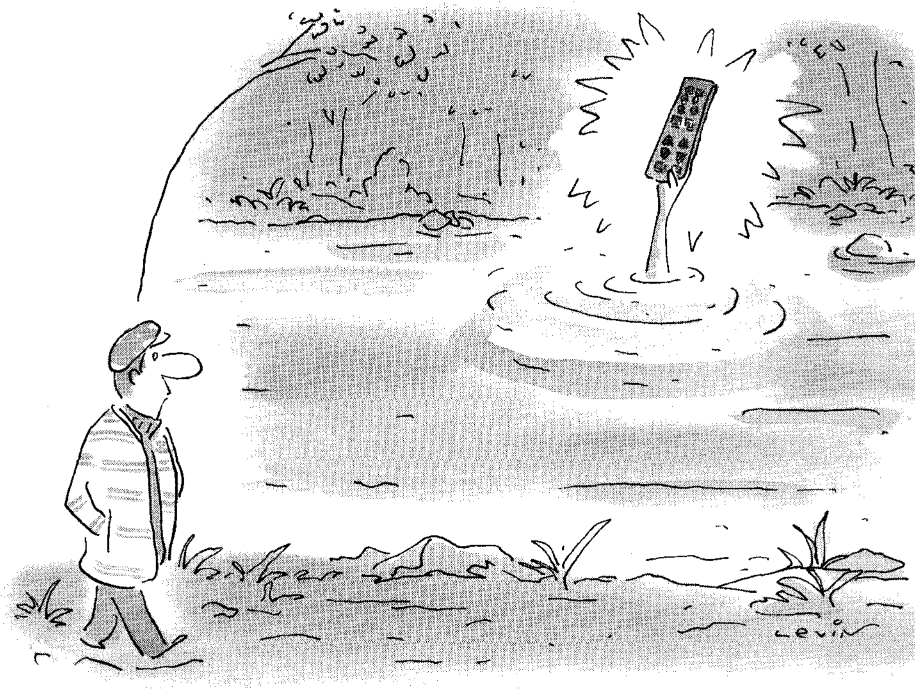
"Beautiful wife!" Nanapush was overcome. "Precious sweetheart!"

As they gazed upon each other with great love, holding the rare moment of mutual agreeableness, the hooves of the moose struck the first sandbar near shore, and Margaret cried out for her husband to lift the gun and shoot.

"Not quite yet, my beloved," Nanapush said confidently, "he can drag us nearer yet!"

"Watch out! Shoot now!"

The moose was indeed approaching the shallows, but Nanapush planned in his pride to shoot the animal just as he began to pull them from the water, thereby making their task of dressing and hauling mere child's play. He got the moose in his sights and then waited



as it gained purchase. The old man's feet, annoyingly, tangled in the fishing tackle he had been too lazy to put away, and he jigged, attempting to kick it aside.

"Margaret, duck!" he cried. Just as the moose lunged onto land he let blast, completely missing and totally terrifying the animal, which gave a hopping skip that seemed impossible for a thing so huge, and veered straight up the bank. Margaret, reaching back to tear the gun from her husband's hands, was bucked completely out of the boat and said later that if only her no-good man hadn't insisted on holding on to the gun she could have landed, aimed, and killed them both, as she then wished to do most intensely. Instead, as the moose tore off with the boat still securely tied by three ropes to his antlers, she was left behind screaming for the fool to jump. But he did not, and within moments the rampaging moose, with the boat bounding behind, had disappeared into the woods.

"My man is stubborn," she said, dusting off her skirt, checking to make sure that she was still in one piece, nothing broken or cut. "He will surely kill that moose!" She spoke hopefully, but inside she felt stuffed with a combination of such anxiety and rage that she did not know what to do—to try to rescue Nanapush or to chop him into pieces with the hatchet that she found herself sharpening as she listened for the second report of his gun.

Bloof!

Yes. There it was. Good thing he didn't jump out, she muttered. She began to tramp, with her carrying straps and an extra sharp knife, in the direction of the noise.

In fact, that Nanapush did not jump out of the boat had little to do with his great stubbornness or his bravery. When the moose jolted the boat up the shore, the tackle that had already wound around him flew beneath his rear as he bounced upward and three of his finest fishing hooks stuck deep into his buttocks as he landed, fastening him tight. He screeched in pain, further horrifying the animal, and struggled, driving the hooks in still deeper, until he could only hold on to the edge of the boat with one hand, gasping in agony, as with the other he attempted to raise the gun to his shoulder and kill the moose.

All the time, of course, the moose was running wildly. Pursued by this strange, heavy, screeching, banging, booming thing, it fled in dull terror through bush and slough. It ran and continued to run. Those who saw Nanapush as he passed all up and down the reservation stood a moment in fascinated shock and rubbed their eyes, then went to fetch others, so that soon the predicament of Nanapush was known and reported everywhere. By then, the moose had attained a smooth loping trot, and passed with swift ease through farmsteads and pastures, the boat flying up and then disappearing down behind. Many stopped what they were doing to gape and yell, and others ran for their rifles, but they were all too late to shoot the moose and free poor Nanapush.

ONE day passed. In his moose-drawn fishing boat, Nanapush toured every part of the reservation that he'd ever hunted and saw everyone that he'd ever known and then went to places that he hadn't visited since childhood. At one point, a family digging cattail roots were stunned to see the boat, the moose towing it across a slough, and a man slumped over, for by now poor Nanapush had given up and surrendered to the pain, which at least, he said later, he shared with the beast, whose rump he'd stung with bullets. The moose was heading now for the most remote parts of the reservation, where poor Nanapush was convinced he surely would die.

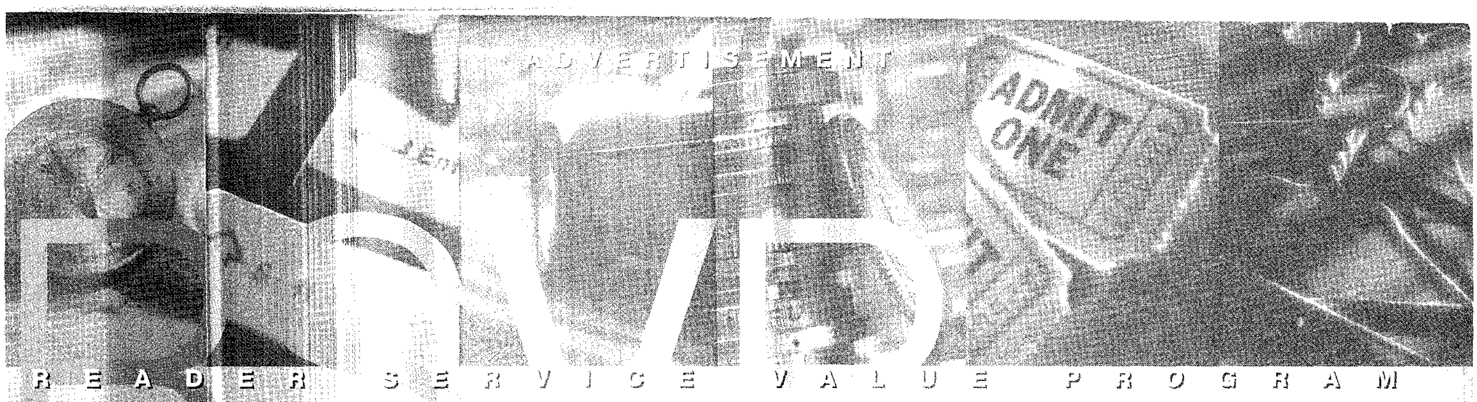
"*Niijii*," he cried out to the moose, "my brother, slow down!"

The animal flicked back an ear to catch the sound of the thing's voice, but didn't stop.

"I will kill no more!" declared Nanapush. "I now throw away my gun!" And he cast it aside, after kissing the barrel and noting well his surroundings. But as though it sensed and felt only contempt for the man's hypocrisy, the moose snorted and kept moving.

"I apologize to you," cried Nanapush, "and to all of the moose I have ever killed and to the spirit of the moose and the boss of the moose and to every moose that has lived or will ever live in the future."

As if slightly placated, the moose slowed to a walk, and Nanapush was able, finally, to snatch a few berries from the bushes they passed, to scoop up a mouthful of water from the slough, and



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to sleep, though by moonlight the moose still browsed and walked toward some goal, thought Nanapush, delirious with exhaustion and pain. Perhaps the next world. Perhaps this moose had been sent by the all-clever Creator to fetch Nanapush along to the spirit life in this novel way. But, just as he was imagining such a thing, the first light showed and by that ever-strengthening radiance he saw that his moose did indeed have a direction and an intention and that that object was a female moose of an uncommonly robust size, just ahead, peering over her shoulder in a way that was apparently bewitching to a male moose, for Nanapush's animal uttered a squeal of bullish intensity that he recognized as pure lust.

Nanapush, now wishing that he had aimed for the huge swinging balls of the moose, wept with exasperation.

"Should I be subjected to this? This, too? In addition to all that I have suffered?" And Nanapush cursed the moose, cursed himself, the fishhooks, and the person who so carefully and sturdily constructed the boat that would not fall apart. He cursed in English, as there are no true swear words in Ojibwemowin, and so it was Nanapush and not the Devil whom Josette Bizhieu heard passing by her remote cabin at first light, shouting all manner of unspeakable and innovative imprecations, and it was Nanapush, furthermore, who was heard howling in the deep slough grass, howling, though more dead at this point than alive, at the outrageous acts he was forced to witness there, before his nose, as the boat tipped up and the bull moose in the extremity of his passion loved the female moose with ponderous mountings and thrilling thrusts that swung Nanapush from side to side but did not succeed in dislodging him from the terrible grip of the fishhooks. No, that was not to happen. Nanapush was bound to suffer for one more day before the satisfied moose toppled over to snore and members of the rescue party Margaret had raised crept up and shot the animal stone dead in its sleep.

The moose, Margaret found, for she had brought with her a meat hatchet, had lost a distressing amount of fat and its meat was now stringy from the long flight and sour with a combination of fear and spent sex, so that in butchering it she winced and moaned and travelled far in her raging thoughts, imagining sore revenges she would exact upon her husband.

In the meantime, Father Damien, who had followed his friend as best he could in the parish touring car, was able to assist those who emerged from the bush. He drove Nanapush, raving, to Sister Hildegarde, who was adept at extracting fishhooks. At the school infirmary, she was not upset to see the bare buttocks of Nanapush sticking straight up in the air. She swabbed the area with iodine and tested the strength of her pliers. With great relief for his friend and a certain amount of pity, Father Damien tried to make him smile: "Don't be ashamed of your display. Even the Virgin Mary had two asses, one to sit upon and the other ass that bore her to Egypt."

Nanapush only nodded gloomily and gritted his teeth as Sister Hildegarde pushed the hook with the pliers until the barbed tip broke through his tough skin, then clipped the barb off and pulled out the rest of the hook.

"Is there any chance," he weakly croaked once the operation was accomplished, "that this will affect my manhood?"

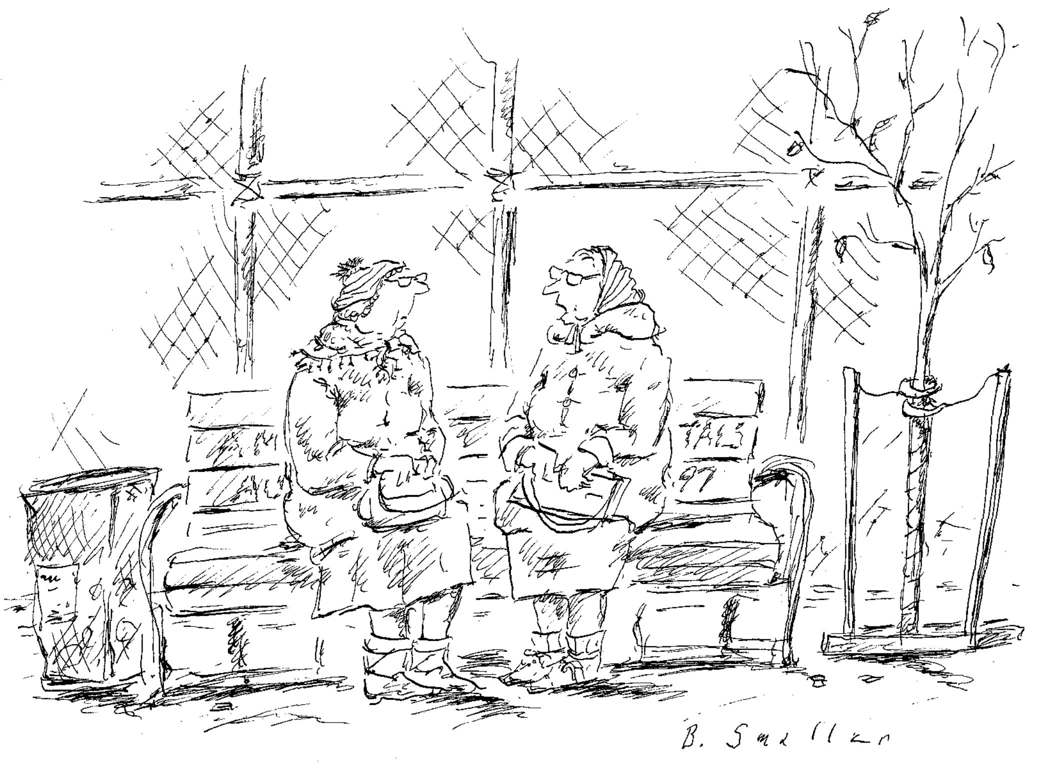
"Unfortunately not," Hildegarde said.

The lovemaking skills of Nanapush, whole or damaged, were to remain untested until after his death. For Margaret took a long time punishing her husband. She ignored him, she browbeat him, and, worst of all, she cooked for him.

It was the winter of instructional beans, for every time Margaret boiled up a pot of rock-hard pellets drawn from the fifty-pound sack of beans that were their only sustenance besides the sour strings of meat, she reminded Nanapush of each brainless turning point last fall at which he should have killed the moose but did not.

"And my," she sneered then, "wasn't its meat both tender and sweet before you ran it to rags?"

She never boiled the beans quite soft enough, either, for she could will her own body to process the toughest sinew with no trouble. Nanapush, however, suffered digestive torments of a nature that soon



"Am I the smart one and you're the pretty one or is it the other way around?"

became destructive to his health and ruined their nightly rest entirely, for that is when the great explosive winds would gather in his body. His *boogidiwinan*, which had always been manly, yet meek enough to remain under his control, overwhelmed the power of his *ojiid*, and there was nothing he could do but surrender to their whims and force. At least it was a form of revenge on Margaret, he thought, exhausted, near dawn. But at the same time he worried that she would leave him. Already, she made him sleep on a pile of skins near the door so as not to pollute her flowered mattress.

"My precious one," he sometimes begged, "can you not spare me? Boil the beans a while longer, and the moose, as well. Have pity!"

She only raised her brow, and her glare was a slice of knifelike light. Maybe she was angriest because she'd softened toward him during that moose ride across the lake, and now she was determined to punish him for her uncharacteristic lapse into tenderness. At any rate, one night she boiled the beans only long enough to soften their skins and threw in a chunk of moose that was coated with a green mold she claimed was medicinal, but which tied poor Nanapush's guts in knots.

"Eat up, old man." She banged the plate down before him. He saw that she was implacable, and then he thought back to the way he had got around the impasse of the maple syrup before, and resolved to do exactly the opposite of what he felt. And so, resigned to sacrificing this night to pain, desperate, he proceeded to loudly enjoy the beans.

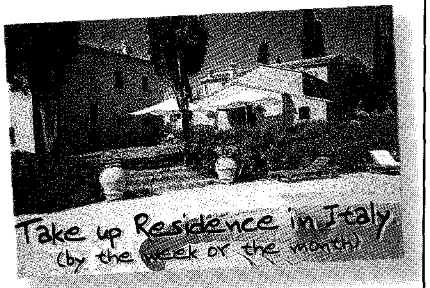
"They are excellent, *niwiiw*, crunchy and fine! *Minopogwad!*" He wolfed them down, eager as a boy, and tore at the moldy moose as though presented with the finest morsels. "Howah! I've never eaten such a fine dish!" He rubbed his belly and smiled in false satisfaction. "*Nindebisinii*, my pretty fawn, oh, how well I'll sleep." He rolled up in his blankets by the door, then, and waited for the gas pains to tear him apart.

They did come. That night was phenomenal. Margaret was sure that the cans of grease rattled on the windowsill, and she saw a glowing stench rise around her husband, saw with her own eyes but chose to plug her ears with wax and turn to the wall, poking an airhole for herself in the mud between logs, and so she fell asleep not knowing that the symphony of sounds that disarranged papers and blew out the door by morning were her husband's last utterances.

Yes, he was dead. She found when she went to shake him awake the next morning that he was utterly lifeless. She gave a shriek then, of abysmal loss, and began to weep with sudden horror at the depth of her unforgiving nature. She kissed his face all over, patted his hands and hair. He did not look as though death had taken him, no, he looked oddly well. Although it would seem that a death of this sort would shrivel him like a spent sack and leave him wrinkled and limp, he was shut tight and swollen, his mouth a firm line and his eyes squeezed shut as though holding something in. And he was stiff as a horn where she used to love him. There was some mistake! Perhaps, thought Margaret, wild in her grief, he was only deeply asleep and she could love him back awake.

She climbed aboard and commenced to ride him until she herself collapsed, exhausted and weeping, on his still breast. It was no use. His manliness still stood straight up and although she could swear the grim smile had deepened on his face, there were no other signs of life—no breath, not the faintest heartbeat could be detected. Margaret fell beside him, senseless, and was found there dishevelled and out cold so that at first Father Damien thought the two had committed a double suicide, as some old people did those hard winters. But Margaret was soon roused. The cabin was aired out. Father Damien, ravaged with the loss, held his old friend Nanapush's hand all day and allowed his own tears to flow, soaking his black gown.

And so it was. The wake and the funeral were conducted in the old way. Margaret prepared his body. She cleaned him, wrapped him in her best quilt. As there was no disguising his bone-tough hard-on, she let it stand there proudly and decided not to be ashamed of her old man's prowess. She laid him on the bed that was her pride, and bitterly regretted how she'd forced him to



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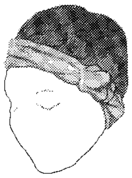

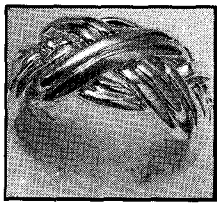

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sleep on the floor in the cold wind by the door.

Everyone showed up that night, bringing food and even a bit of wine, but Margaret wanted nothing of their comfort. Sorrow bit deep into her lungs and the pain radiated out like the shooting rays of a star. She lost her breath. A dizzy veil fell over her. She wanted most of all to express to her husband the terrible depth of the love she felt but had been too proud, too stingy, or, she now saw, too afraid to show him while he lived. She had deprived him of such pleasure: that great horn in his pants, she knew guiltily, was there because she had denied him physical satisfaction ever since the boat ride behind the moose.

"*Nimanendam.* If only he'd come back to me, I'd make him a happy man." She blew her nose on a big white dishcloth and bowed her head. Whom would she scold? Whom would she punish? Who would suffer for Margaret Kashpaw now? What was she to do? She dropped her face into her hands and wept with uncharacteristic abandon. The whole crowd of Nanapush's friends and loved ones, packed into the house, lifted a toast to the old man and made a salute. At last, Father Damien spoke, and his speech was so eloquent that in moments the whole room was bathed in tears and sobs.

It was at that moment, in the depth of their sorrow, just at the hour when they felt the loss of Nanapush most keenly, that a great explosion occurred, a rip of sound. A vicious cloud of stink sent mourners gasping for air. As soon as the fresh winter cold had rolled into the house, however, everyone returned. Nanapush sat straight up, still wrapped in Margaret's best quilt.

"I just couldn't hold it in anymore," he said, embarrassed to find such an assembly of people around him. He proceeded, then, to drink a cup of the mourners' wine. He was unwrapped. He stretched his arms. The wine made him voluble.

"Friends," he said, "how it fills my heart to see you here. I did, indeed, visit the spirit world and there I saw my former wives, now married to other men. Quill was there, and is now making me a pair of *makizinan* beaded on the soles, to wear when I travel there for good. Friends, do not fear. On the other side of life there is plenty of food and no government agents."

Nanapush then rose from the bed and walked among the people tendering greetings and messages from their dead loved ones. At last, however, he came to Margaret, who sat in the corner frozen in shock at her husband's resurrection. "Oh, how I missed my old lady!" he cried and opened his arms to her. But just as she started forward, eager at his forgiveness, he remembered the beans, dropped his arms, and stepped back.

"No matter how I love you," he said then, "I would rather go to the spirit world than stay here and eat your cooking!"

With that, he sank to the floor quite cold and lifeless again. He was carried to the bed and wrapped in the quilt once more, but his body was closely watched for signs of revival. Nobody yet quite believed that he was gone, and it took some time—in fact, they feasted far into the night—before everyone, including poor Margaret, addled now with additional rage and shame, felt certain that he was gone. Of course, just as everyone had accepted the reality of his demise, Nanapush again jerked upright and his eyes flipped open.

"Oh, yai!" exclaimed one of the old ladies. "He lives yet!"

And although everyone well hid their irritation, it was inevitable that there were some who were impatient. "If you're dead, stay dead," someone muttered. Nobody was so heartless as to express this feeling straight out. There was just a slow but certain drifting away of people from the house and it wasn't long, indeed, before even Father Damien had left. He was thrilled to have his old friend back, but in his tactful way intuited that Margaret and Nanapush had much to mend between them and needed to be alone to do it.

Once everyone was gone, Nanapush went over to the door and put the bar down. Then he turned to his wife and spoke before she could say a word.

"I returned for one reason only, my wife. When I was gone and far away, I felt how you tried to revive me with the heat of your body. I was happy you tried to do that—my heart was full. This time when I left with harsh words on my lips about your cooking, I got a ways down the road leading to the spirit world and I just couldn't go any farther, my dear woman, because I had wronged you. I wanted to make things smooth between us. I came back to love you good."

And, between the confusion and the grief, the exhaustion and the bewilderment, Margaret hadn't the wit to do anything but go to her husband and allow all the hidden sweetness of her nature to join the fire he kindled, so that they spent together, in her spring bed, the finest and most elegantly accomplished hours that perhaps lovers ever spent on earth. And when it was over they both fell asleep, and although only Margaret woke up, her heart was at peace.

Margaret would not have Nanapush buried in the ground, but high in a tree, the old way, as Ojibweg did before the priests came. A year later, his bones and the tattered quilt were put into a box and set under a grave house just at the edge of her yard. The grave house was well built, carefully painted a spanking white, and had a small window with a shelf where Margaret always left food. Sometimes she left Nanapush a plate of ill-cooked beans because she missed his complaints, but more often she cooked his favorites, seasoned his meat with maple syrup, pampered and pitied him the way she hadn't dared in life for fear he'd get the better of her, though she wondered why that had ever mattered, now, without him in the simple quiet of her endless life. ♦

Slow lab work resulted in drug charges being dropped against Minnesota running back Leroy Hoard, who still faces a disorderly conduct charge stemming from a problem outside a Miami Beach nightclub. The pills found on Hoard when he was arrested after a scuffle with his girlfriend needed to be produced within 30 days to prove they were ecstasy, and they wasn't.

—*Peoria (Ill.) Journal Star.*

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ROLL OVER, MADISON

How we learned to hate Washington.

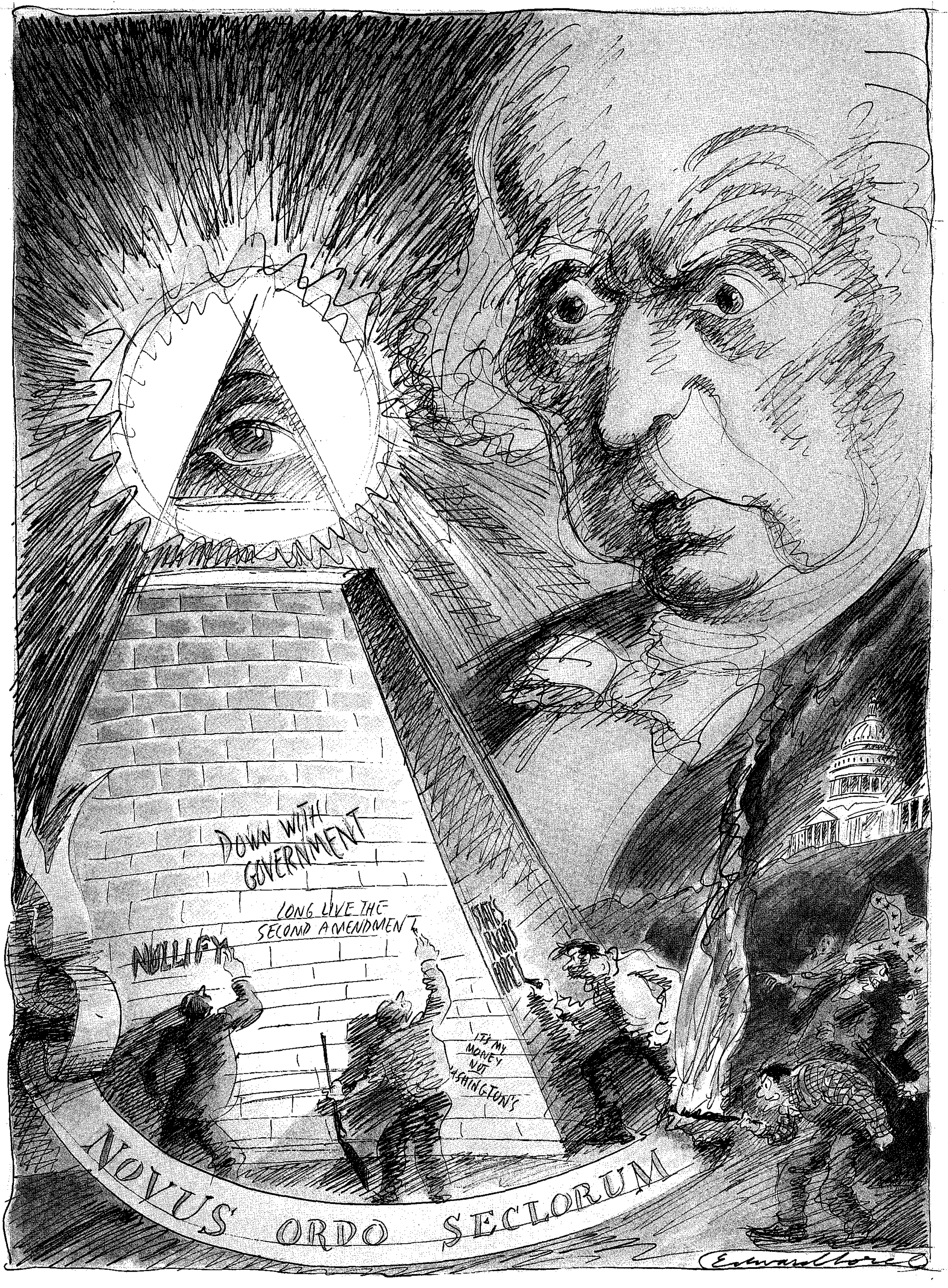
BY TAYLOR BRANCH

IF James Madison, the chief architect of the American system, were to return to life for a millennial inspection of his handiwork, perhaps nothing would dismay him more than the sight of his own silhouette emblazoned on the headquarters of the Federalist Society, in Washington—a states'-rights organization that promotes our era's signature distrust of national government. Even in an age of self-sufficient farmers, Madison looked beyond the states to frame constitutional hopes for liberty in the nation, and he would scarcely have welcomed the pervasive disregard for "big government" of recent decades, with Congress and conservative federal courts shipping authority back to the states, Presidential candidates running against Washington, major media brimming with condescension for any national agenda, and liberal apologists defending halfhearted variations of "Think Globally, Act Locally." Garry Wills, in "A Necessary Evil" (Simon & Schuster; $25), his third book on the foundations of American democracy, writes that Madison "did not go to the Constitutional Convention to defend the states—more nearly to destroy them."

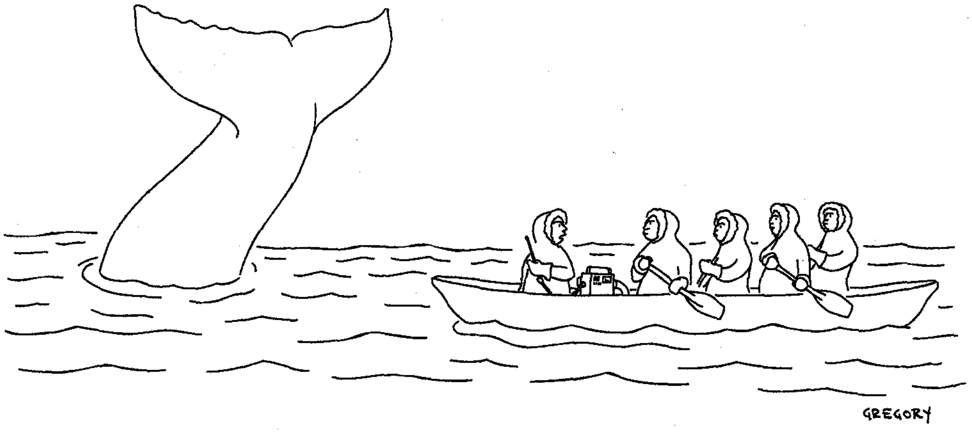
Wills warns that contemporary disdain for government is based upon a misreading of the Madisonian design which endangers its lasting promise. He finds democratic faith shrivelled to the point that many of the students at Northwestern University, where he teaches—and, no doubt, many more readers—are "especially surprised to hear that most thinkers in our Western tradition thought of government as a necessary good, not a necessary evil." What remains evil in our politics "cannot be identified and eliminated from the good," he writes, "if the very existence of the good is being denied at every level." To arouse public discourse from unwarranted pessimism, Wills excavates American history in the style of the Federalist Papers themselves, with closely shaved meaning, grounded realism, and masterly allusion to ancient and American texts. Not since Hannah Arendt wrote on revolution and on totalitarian psychology has a scholar of such broad classical training addressed a popular readership on issues of such moment, and with such animating reverence for what Arendt called the public space among citizens.

Wills reminds us that the first government that the American revolutionaries created, under the 1778 Articles of Confederation, was a decentralized structure that would have gladdened the hearts of devolutionists in the Newt Gingrich electoral surge of 1994. The states coined separate monies and pursued their own foreign policies. Wills notes, "Under the Articles, *every* continental officeholder had a one-year term, and *every* one was subject to term limits." It was precisely such weakness that Madison and his colleagues set about to remedy in Philadelphia, at the Constitutional Convention of 1787—to form a "more perfect" union, not a more feckless one. The new Constitution removed all term limits and created many national powers, including the controversial standing army that has stood ever since. Madison saw the states as too partial for justice ("parties in their own cause"), and, indeed, tried to build into the new Constitution a veto power for the federal government over every state law. He helped design the three-branch separation of powers for greater efficiency—"to unite a proper energy in the executive with a proper stability in the legislative departments," he wrote—and yet the phrase "checks and balances," which does not appear in the Constitution, has become a watchword of an alleged desire on his part to stymie government by internal constraint. Wills debunks this exaggeration along with a dozen related myths. "Americans believe that they have a government which is itself against government, that our Constitution is so distrustful of itself as to hamper itself," he argues. "We are pious toward our history in order to be cynical toward our government. We keep summoning the founders to testify against what they founded."

"IT seems that no bad idea can ever die," Wills laments in "A Necessary Evil." Whereas only the far fringes once feared fluoridated water, a presumption of central poison has seeped through our political culture from truck stops to the Ivy League. Scholars defend a putative right to subvert federal laws by disregarding jury instructions—jury nullification. They defend a right to bear arms, and, as Wills writes, they "argue for insurrection as a right guaranteed *within* the United States Constitution—guaranteed specifically, in the Second Amendment." On this point, he quotes a professor at Yale: "Fresh from their own revolutionary experience, the last thing the Framers would have done is to deny the People the means of armed insurrection." Wills deliberately lumps together the rear-guard liberals of antifederal distrust with spearhead conservatives such as Justice Antonin Scalia, ignoring the disagreements among them to rebuke the whole train of scholars for a commonly backward orientation that seeks freedom by resistance to federal purpose and authority. He is frequently prickly toward those in the acad-


DOWN WITH GOVERNMENT
LONG LIVE THE SECOND AMENDMENT
NULLIFY
STATES' RIGHTS FOREVER
IT'S MY MONEY NOT WASHINGTON'S
NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM
Edward Sorel

In our anti-government cynicism, Garry Wills writes, "we keep summoning the founders to testify against what they founded."



"Instead of killing the whale for its blubber, we're going to do a little lipo."

• •

emy whom he considers to be slackers, but the nullification theorists drive him into a transcendent zone. "These scholars exemplify this book's point so well," Wills observes, "that I suppose I should be grateful to them for that."

Wills indicts several prominent "academic insurrectionists" for bad history, bad logic, and bad faith. First, he states that in their myopic search for precedent they draw supporting quotations almost exclusively from the minority Antifederalists, who "were not framers of the Constitution but opponents of it, those who tried to prevent its adoption because it did *not* express their fear of government." Second, the scholars mistakenly believe that the Founders anchored anti-government hopes in Second Amendment militias, whereas, once the Antifederalists had lost the constitutional battle, they also lost interest in the militias. Their whole point, Wills writes, "was that resistance to the government, whether by insurrection or other means, would be doomed if the government were given the crushing power of a standing army. . . . They wanted militias as an *alternative* to a standing army." Third, the scholars and kindred pundits distort the role of James Madison, overlooking the fact that he sponsored the four separate clauses that established the national military. Fourth, they mangle the Second Amendment itself, laboring vainly to give a handgun-friendly civilian meaning to the term "bear arms." ("If they are inadequate as historians," Wills says, "they are ludicrous as philologists.") Madison designed the Second Amendment in part as a consolation prize to win back the support of disaffected Antifederalists, and his provision for guaranteed federal supply of the militias addressed the prosaic reality of early America. "There was a drastic shortage of guns," Wills writes, noting that militia volunteers commonly showed up with rusty flintlocks and farm implements when they mustered at all. "There was one gun for every ten people in the colonies. Now there is more than one for every man, woman, and child in America, with three for every adult male of the population. Yet this latter situation is justified by appeal to the former."

Here Wills charges a fifth error: that to support gun rights the scholars mingle legends of revolutionary Minutemen with Hollywood visions of pioneers unfettered on the range, securing "their own liberties with their own arms." In fact, George Washington's Continental Army won the revolution, and there were no quick-draw duels ("never, ever happened") in the streets of frontier cattle towns. Wills recognizes the real Wild West as "the birthplace of strict gun-control laws," with handgun restrictions that allowed fabled Dodge City to average two killings per year in the Wyatt Earp era. Our wayward frontier mythology now sustains an avalanche of private firepower that safeguards public liberty like the Marlboro Man fostered public health.

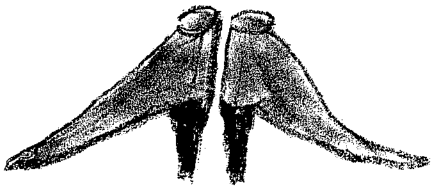
These fantasies suggest a sixth error in the unblushing claim of a constitutionally sanctioned right to fight Washington. "It makes no sense to say that I must overthrow this abomination, but only because it has given me permission to do so," the much vexed Wills declares, adding that none of the scholars—"not even the most ardent idolater of the Second Amendment"—seeks to impugn or dissolve the U.S. military as a severe inconvenience to insurrectionist prospects outside the classroom and the radio booth. Lastly, Wills accuses the scholars of a backward slant on the very nature of the militias. Contrary to their image as homespun liberators, the militias served primarily as mobile instruments for political control—of Indians, of renegade gangs, and, in the South, of slave revolts and runaways. Modern echoes from these sensitive issues reverberate around what Wills calls "the great myth of the slaveholding South"—that rebellion nobly resists oppression from Washington instead of fostering it at home. "Patrick Henry's fear that a national government would interfere with racial relations within a state has certainly come true," Wills writes. "But has this destroyed human freedom or increased it?" The states codified slavery and segregation; the federal government abolished them to raise the flag higher. That has been the pattern of performance on all the great issues.

How did we stray so far from historical balance? Wills concedes that the Founders themselves faltered in early tests of their democratic model, which, adapted from failures discarded since ancient Greece, rated somewhere between laughingstock and long shot in a world of sovereign monarchs. In 1804, Senator Timothy Pickering (George Washington's former Secretary of State), of Massachusetts, tried to organize a secession of states because he believed that Jefferson had exceeded his authority in the Louisiana Purchase, and disunionist movements intensified in Pickering's New England before they spread south over slavery. Earlier, in the wake of the French Revolution, Jefferson and Madison themselves conspired to the edge of rebellion. When the high Federalists under Adams rammed through the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, imprisoning briefly about two dozen critics whom they considered "Jacobin" extremists, Jefferson and Madison fatefully panicked. They decided that Adams had voided the new constitutional bond by usurpation, and Jefferson, the sitting Vice-President, secretly worked with allies in the Kentucky legislature to draft resolutions claiming for each state a right of "nullification" against obnoxious federal laws. His collaborator Madison, also anonymously, coined a milder claim to a state's right of "interposition" in a draft he submitted in his native Virginia.

Madison's lapse of trust in his own national design would remain safely hidden for nearly thirty years after the crisis of 1798 receded. Virginia and Kentucky omitted the inflammatory words from their resolutions, and no other states approved circulating petitions to join the challenge. The offending sedition laws expired or were repealed, and, most significant, President Adams and his ensconced Federalists reluctantly but peacefully surrendered national offices to their hated Jeffersonian rivals after the 1800 elections. But after Jefferson and Adams—long since reconciled—both died, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration, July 4, 1826, archivists unearthed and published news that Jefferson not only had instigated the Kentucky Resolutions but had submitted secret drafts full of what Wills accurately calls "almost hysterical reaction" to the Alien and Sedition Acts, with anti-Union language that "talked recklessly of secession or insurrection." From the grave, the great name of Jefferson inflamed national controversy around Senator John C. Calhoun, of South Carolina, who advanced theories of nullification to protect slavery. Calhoun's heirs have since claimed Jefferson for states' rights, while their ideological opponents have claimed him for the grass roots. "Jefferson's Kentucky Resolutions might be called the basic document of anti-governmentalism in America, much cited and even revered," Wills writes.

When Madison was discovered to have been Jefferson's secret partner, the belated uproar over what Wills calls his "momentary surrender to 'the spirit of '98' " mortified him in his old age, and has haunted American politics ever since. Laboring to protect his distinctive voice for constitutional union, Madison repudiated nullification as a "colossal heresy." He explicated features of the Constitution that were plainly inconsistent with notions of state primacy, and powerful figures, including slaveholders, supported his view. "Secession, like any other revolutionary act, may be morally justified by the extremity of oppression; but to call it a constitutional right is confounding the meaning of terms," President Andrew Jackson proclaimed in 1832, vowing to arrest Calhoun if he continued into treason as properly defined—acts of war against the nation, not a state. Still, despite these and many other Madisonian arguments—down to Lincoln's last plea to avert civil war by cogent proof that no political body had ever been "a state *out* of the union"—Wills reports that many of his students arrive on campus today believing that only Lincoln's brute force subdued the just and superior right of preëxisting states to free choice, and American opinion flocks uncritically to support nearly any local secession around the world.

MADISON'S lapse of 1798 can be explained, if not justified, by the frailty of infant democracy in an age accustomed to hierarchy, liege lords, and bloody resistance. Wills ascribes the puzzling resurgence in recent times to a "deep emotional engagement in the anti-government values." To investigate its sources, he moves away from detailed history to sketch contributing attitudes from four disparate writers of the past two centuries: Henry David Thoreau, Henry Adams, Albert Jay Nock, and H. L. Mencken. From Thoreau, Wills extracts a revulsion for all civic affairs, especially voting, which he disparaged as "sort of gaming, like chequers or backgammon, with a slight moral tinge to it, a playing with right and wrong." Thoreau achieved his sublime isolation at Walden Pond by purifying himself out of human company, Wills says. He could not bear the smell of distant perfumes or the faintest whiff of friends who tried to bail him out of jail, saying that their inclination to smelly conversation condemned them as "a distinct race from me . . . as the Chinamen and Malays are." (Wills chides that Thoreau, in his antiseptic vainglory, "manages the clever feat of being racist toward his own race.")



In Henry Adams, Wills identifies a detachment that regards politics as a spectacle of fools. "The Senate took the place of Shakespeare, and offered real Brutuses and Bolingbrokes . . . like schoolboys in their simplicity," Adams wrote during the Theodore Roosevelt era, having earlier refined his disdain for the nineteenth-century populists who clattered into the gentleman's Enlightenment. Wills quotes a letter from Adams to the president of Harvard, his alma mater, archly rejecting an entreaty to tolerate President Andrew Jackson as a guest honoree at commencement: "I would not be present to witness her disgrace in conferring her highest literary honors upon a barbarian who could not write a sentence of grammar and hardly could spell his own name."

With esoteric awareness, Wills, who wrote for *National Review* early in his career, presents Albert Jay Nock as the "spiritual progenitor" of that magazine and therefore of the modern conservative movement. He isolates in Nock an explicit core of anti-democratic ideology that is normally submerged in American discourse. Nock wrote in order to prepare "the saving Remnant" of civilization for the inevitable doom of the American experiment. He considered the popular will a pusillanimous doctrine based on what he called the subhuman "mass-man," and did not shrink from prescribing its failure in all forms, inside and outside the United States: "Indeed, if it be true that the mass-man is not a human being, never has been, and never will be, no such society can possibly be developed, and all our schemes for it are visionary."

Next to the rock-ribbed Nock, H. L. Mencken is light fare on the "booboisie" of America. Wills summarizes the "profoundly anti-democratic" themes of Mencken's five major books, and recalls the penchant of chuckling readers to forgive his blustery, satirical prejudices. "But even as clown he helped feed the fashionable anti-governmentalism, as I know to my regret," he confesses. "At a time in the late 1960s, when I admired his journalism, and partly because of its influence, I stopped voting."

This personal statement comes as a startling departure from Wills's reserved manner and civic devotion. He reveals his own "momentary surrender" in a sparing account that is admirably restrained

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but unequal to his larger argument. Relatively few Americans were exposed to government-bashing directly by Mencken, let alone Nock, and Wills, ironically, seeks to defend democracy by indulging a taste for scholastic shorthand. His thinkers faintly suggest but scarcely influenced the jarring events that swept the entire political spectrum into its prolonged Madisonian lapse. Shortly before the Voting Rights Act of 1965 enfranchised five million subjugated black Southerners at the zenith of postwar confidence in national politics, it became uncouth to advocate racial segregation in public but respectable—first in the South—to denounce Washington for oppressive meddling. Converts sprang up to hijack the party of Lincoln where it had been extinct, ending the hegemony of the "Solid South" Democrats, and they, with their allies, came to dominate national elections, for three decades running, on the simple message that our national government is bad. The Vietnam War spread that hardheaded Nockian theme with corrosive duplicity and meaningless slaughter, which is what drove Wills briefly to his Walden retreat from voting.

After the subsequent decade of Watergate scandals, undertow revelations about assassination conspiracies, and humiliation by the Ayatollah, Washington sank to a Menckenesque farce of fiscal incontinence by running up trillions of dollars of new debt that mocked the basic pretense of self-government. Into this battered national condition burst stupefying news of the Cold War's triumphant end, but the inherent strength of free government had become so discredited that the nonviolent quakes from Moscow and Berlin to Prague were somehow understood as military victories, the result of our mountainous preparations for Armageddon. We remain largely numb to the spiritual and intellectual force of our own example. The Soviet demise also deflated the nuclear-tipped ideological duel that had riveted the world for forty years. The crusade that had centered the news and made statesmen of reporters was suddenly gone, and a mood of disoriented, post-battle ennui spilled over alongside the accumulated distrust of government. Together they reduced Washington from bad to useless, fit for mockery in the style of Henry Adams.

WILLS now faces students who have lived entirely in a span of Madisonian lapse. Their patriotic scope has been atrophied by its drip of cynicism, and they bring with them some of its "crudely hydraulic" notions of strict trade-off between power and freedom—that any flow of power exacts an equal penalty from the citizen, and that "one must be constantly vigilant, therefore, to see that the state takes away as little of one's freedom as possible." Replying first with "something rather trivial," Wills points to laws that regulate road travel with stoplights, right-of-way rules, and speed limits, among a host of regimentations that are "immensely liberating" in reality, both for physical movement and for peace of mind. "An increase of power does not necessarily entail a corresponding loss of rights," he observes. "Sometimes greater power is precisely what leads to greater rights. . . . In certain kinds of war, the most basic right of all—the right to live—can be protected only by the state's assumption of vast war-making powers."

Logic alone, however, is no match for the tenor of an era. To refute canards on government as the enemy of free markets, Wills quotes David Hume teaching what drug dealers and Russian capitalists know from hard experience—that without political authority to guarantee contracts, markets are a shooting gallery. He brings in Socrates on the origins of the public space and St. Augustine on love as the bond of the state. He argues that most of the democratic wounds from the recent era are healing, that the chorus of bad government has begun to weary its audience, and that classified national secrecy is the only legacy left dangerously intact. Unarmed truth has moved governments toward reform more effectively than subversion or contempt, he says, which suggests that those who rely on shotguns in the closet would do better to emulate Rosa Parks.

For patriotic witness, Wills appeals to Madison and Martin Luther King, Jr. He confronts the popular notion that the American system is designed as a collision of selfish interests, as George Will contends: "Madison's attention is exclusively on controlling passions with countervailing passions; he is not concerned with the amelioration or reform of passions." Nonsense, Wills says. This again is blinding myth from the Antifederalists and their "low view of human nature . . . that any grant of power was bound to be abused." Madison told the Virginia ratifying convention in 1788 that "to suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people is a chimerical idea." He separated the functions of government to guard against tyranny but never limited the potential of the citizens, writing in Federalist No. 39 that republican determination "animates every votary of freedom to rest all our political experiments on the capacity of mankind for self-government." This is the unbounded hope expressed by King, whose career was an anguished appeal for the whole people to vindicate, through their national government, the Founders' intuition of equal citizenship.

"All this may seem a little high-minded and vaporous to people who are complaining about their taxes, the bureaucracy, or business regulations," Wills concludes. "The arbitrary and petty acts of government are enough to make anyone grumble. But all human relationships grate or gall at times—which does not make us call the parent-child relationship, or the husband-wife bond, or friendship, mere necessary evils. They are necessary goods that do not uniformly please. Love itself is a bondage. But the inability to love would stifle and imprison far more cruelly."

If Madison had returned to life a century ago, he would have found the earth still thick with emperors, kings, and dictators, and menaced by totalitarian inventions soon to be born. Now, under Madison's influence, even the fledgling systems, while awkward and often suffering, are nearly everywhere free. Suffragettes became rabbis and sports stars in the blink of a century. Nelson Mandela stepped far from his prison cell. Garry Wills cannot dispel the sour breath of recent decades with a single book, but he restores perspective and integrity to the enduring story of an America that can welcome Madison honorably at this millennium, beckoning the rest of us forward. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

SO I AM GLAD, by A. L. Kennedy (Knopf; $23). Jennifer Wilson is a self-described "empty" person, an emotional nihilist who is unable—or unwilling—to give herself over to another. It makes a certain kind of sense, then, that she works as a radio announcer, veiled by anonymity; it even, bizarrely, makes sense that when she falls for someone it is her odd new flatmate—Cyrano de Bergerac. Kennedy is hearteningly serious about this proposition: Cyrano, it seems, has been restored to life and "dropped" into a house in contemporary Glasgow, where he becomes addicted to tranquillizers and struggles to overcome the fear of his own past. Although Jennifer's mordant narration is at first suffocating, Kennedy explores the improbability of her love with the gravity of a philosopher and the license of a daydreamer.

GIRL WITH A PEARL EARRING, by Tracy Chevalier (Dutton; $21.95). This ultimately absorbing novel about Vermeer and his household at first seems overplotted. Griet, the new servant girl, arranges chopped vegetables by color, so the reader can't miss the fact that she and the painter are soulmates. (Eventually, Griet will pose for the famous portrait of the title.) But Chevalier's writing skill and her knowledge of seventeenth-century Delft are such that she creates a world reminiscent of a Vermeer interior: suspended in a particular moment, it transcends its time and place.

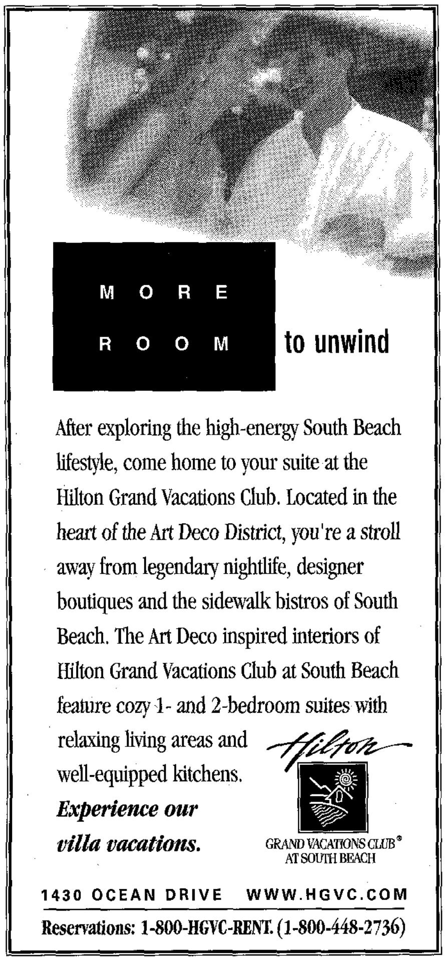
THE UNBURIED, by Charles Palliser (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $24). Like Palliser's earlier "The Quincunx," this novel is a pastiche of nineteenth-century melodramas, a mystery set in an English cathedral close whose inhabitants bear little resemblance to Trollope's competitive but essentially gentlemanly clergy. The somewhat claustrophobic arena, we learn, has been the background for murders in the past, and another occurs in the novel's present. All the murders are puzzles, and Palliser constructs his plot like a maze and lures his readers into it. The book's ruthless consistency of style and the somewhat bleak view of humankind set it apart from the usual thriller.

WHO KILLED HOLLYWOOD?, by Peter Bart (Renaissance; $24.95). Few people understand the complex interplay of idiosyncratic personality, fiscal imperative, and aesthetic consideration behind contemporary moviemaking as well as Bart, who was for many years a studio executive before becoming the editor-in-chief of *Variety*. This collection presents the work of a virtuoso kibbitzer as he analyzes the moves of major dealmakers, directors, writers, and producers over the past decade—a time when "corporate gigantism" has increasingly demanded blockbuster megapics that emphasize sensation and multimedia promotional tie-ins at the expense of story and character. With vinegar wit, Bart deflates the self-important, offers unsolicited advice to studio heads and stars, and vainly seeks to instill historical memory and a sense of conscience in an industry ruled by perpetual attention-deficit disorder.

JUST SIX NUMBERS, by Martin Rees (Basic; $22).There is nothing stranger than the universe we inhabit. Rees, Britain's Astronomer Royal, has written a brief, readable, and profoundly instructive account of where cosmological knowledge stands at this moment: how the universe took the shape it did, what structures now prevail in it, and what it will be like many billions of years from now. His book explains how finely tuned the forces that govern the universe are, and reminds us of the dimensions of what we still don't know. Rees writes, "The atoms that comprise our bodies and that make all visible stars and galaxies are mere trace-constituents of a universe whose large-scale structure is controlled by some quite different (and invisible) substance. We see, as it were, just the white foam on the wave-crests, not the massive waves themselves." This is the kind of book that transforms not only how you look at a clear winter sky but also how you think about life itself.

FEEDING THE EYE, by Anne Hollander (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $27). In a preface to this collection, Hollander declares herself "permanently devoted to art, sex, religion, dance, clothes, and movies," and her essays reflect that devotion. Most of them are book reviews, but, however ephemeral or misguided the books, Hollander's comments are worth reading because she always supplies something extra—an insight or comparison that stimulates reflection or helps solve an artistic riddle—and her humor is understated almost to slyness.

WHAT WAS TRUE: THE PHOTOGRAPHS AND NOTEBOOKS OF WILLIAM GEDNEY, edited by Margaret Sartor; co-edited by Geoff Dyer (Lyndhurst/Norton; $35). The late William Gedney was a photographer of unusual grace and tenderness, but, after a solo exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1968, he did little to promote his work. His best pictures—whether depicting street scenes in India, the life of a Kentucky coal-mining family, or the peregrinations of young hippies through the Haight—achieve an offhand intimacy whose resonance derives from his deep understanding of the nature of solitude. A voracious reader, Gedney meticulously copied out passages from the writings of other artists into notebooks he had made himself. A quotation from John Cage, originally chosen as the epigraph for an unrealized book, describes Gedney as well as his subjects: "They seem to be doing happy things sadly, or maybe they're doing sad things happily." Gedney died of AIDS, at the age of fifty-six, in 1989. This beautiful collection accords him the recognition he shied from in his lifetime.



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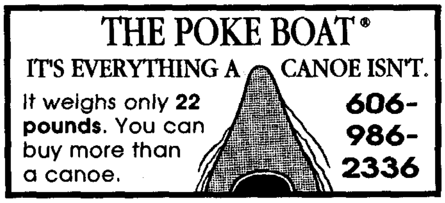

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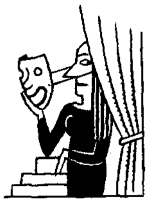
BY JOHN LAHR

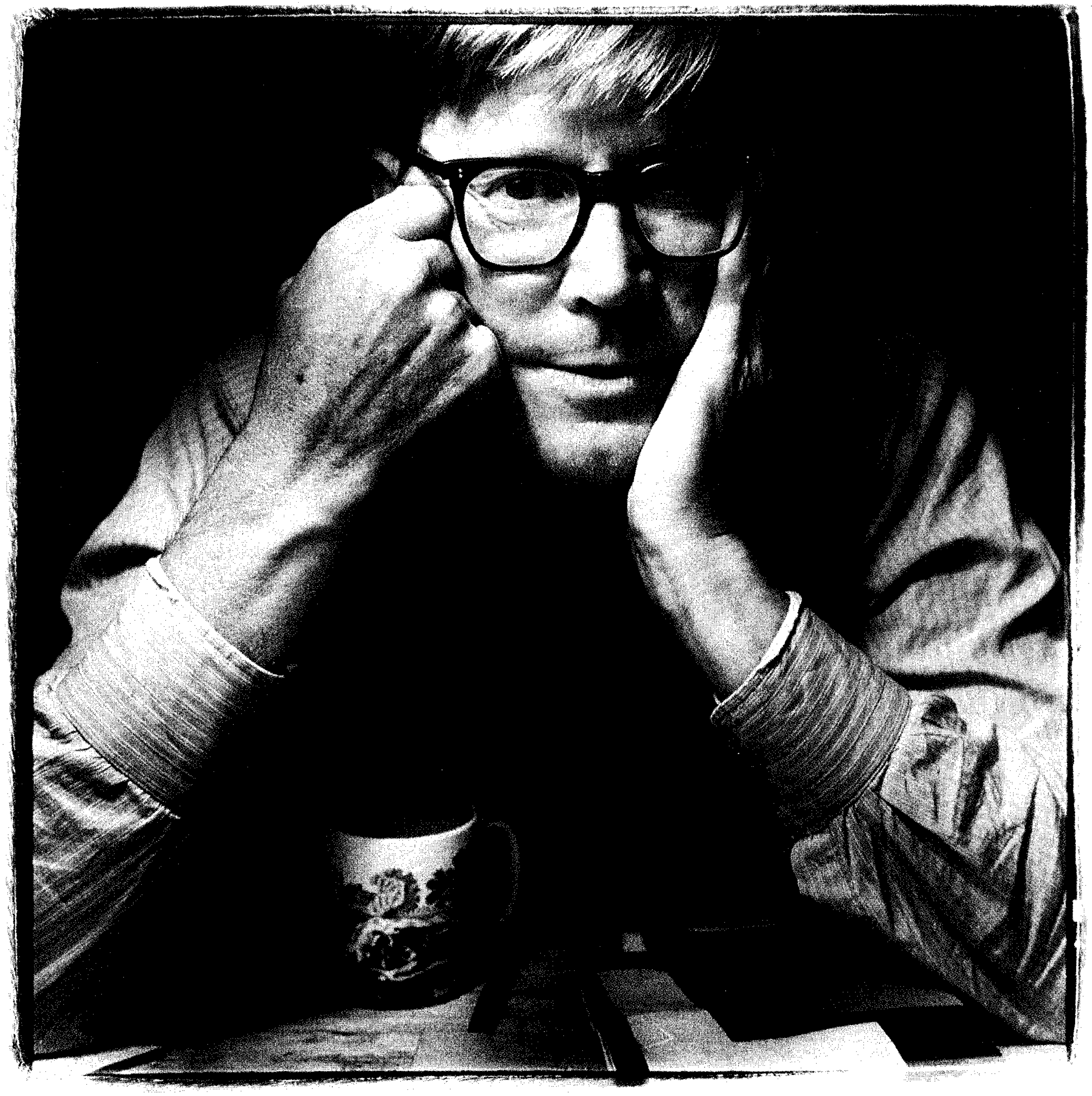


IF you had visited the playwright Alan Bennett anytime between 1974 and 1989 at his large house, on the corner of a fashionable crescent in London's Camden Town—within spitting distance of such grandees of English culture as Jonathan Miller, A. J. Ayer, Claire Tomalin, and Beryl Bainbridge—you would have passed the residence of the latest celebrity on the block, Miss Shepherd. For a decade and a half, until her death, at the age of seventy-eight, Miss Mary Shepherd lived in a Bedford van parked just inside Bennett's front gate and to the side of the large bay window where Bennett had (and still has) his writing desk, and from which his owlish face peeked out at the world through usually closed Venetian blinds. The van was curtained, too; but sometimes, through the window screen, you could discern movement in the murk. In the summer, especially, even if you couldn't glimpse Miss Shepherd, you could smell her. Bennett had run a power line from his house to hers; over the years, their connection, however fraught and eccentric, was more than expedient. She was there to mess up Bennett's tidy, cloistered existence, and he, having initially helped her push her van onto his road, became her improbable protector, inviting her to park in his front garden to prevent her from being towed away by the Camden authorities.

"I see how the location of Miss Shepherd and the van in front but to the side of where I write is the location of most of the stuff I write about: that too is to the side and never what faces me," Bennett wrote in "The Lady in the Van" (1988), his charming memoir of their arrangement, which he later transformed into a series of BBC radio talks and has now worked up as a West End hit, playing at the Queens Theatre. Dame Maggie Smith takes the role of the human found object whom Bennett, with his compassion and wry wit, has turned into art, and into the most famous and certainly the funniest bag lady in Great Britain. In his memoir Bennett sees Miss Shepherd as a metaphor for his writing life; in his play, where he has addressed his ambivalence by dividing himself into two characters—Bennett the exploitative writer (Kevin McNally) and Bennett the put-upon but decent citizen (Nicholas Farrell)—he uses her cautiously as a metaphor for aspects of his own hidden psyche.

Throughout the years of Bennett's growing acclaim as a writer and popularity as a public personality—he, perhaps more than anyone else, embodies the brooding, ironic voice of English resignation—Miss Shepherd was there, literally at his doorstep, as a kind of parallax reflection of his own darkness. Both were shadowy solitaries who had evolved sensational ways of keeping the world at arm's length. "True I have started noting down the odd things people say," Bennett the Writer remarks at the beginning of the play, in the late sixties, commenting on his lack of curiosity about mankind. "But contact with the actual creatures themselves I keep to a minimum." To hide both panic and egotism, he and Miss Shepherd each manufactured successful iconic disguises. Miss Shepherd's jumble-sale getup—whose final touch was a black golf cap perched on top of a head scarf she kept tied under her chin—was very much part of what she called her "incognito position": an aggressively crazy ensemble that insured that nobody paid her any mind. It was much the same with Bennett, whose physical image, like his hangdog tone, is famously, spectacularly modest. Except for some brown suède shoes, which I don't recall his wearing, and which here seem too posh for his persona, he is presented onstage in the camouflage of tweedy normality with which he always faced the world: herringbone jacket, V-neck sweater, button-down cotton shirt, plain knit tie.

It was not just in their defenses that Bennett and Miss Shepherd resembled each other but in their method of sur-



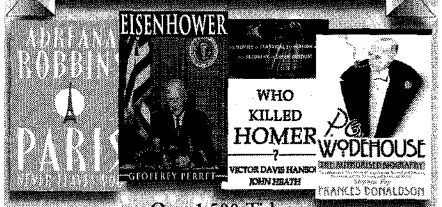
STEVE PYKE/KATZ/MATRIX

Alan Bennett, the voice of brooding English resignation. He let Miss Shepherd park her van in his garden for fifteen years.

vival: both picked over and hoarded trash. Miss Shepherd stored her treasures in the van, which was bursting with a lifetime's detritus; Bennett scavenged English life for the junk of language and society—Miss Shepherd herself being an archetypal example—which he used as bricks to build his plays and stories. "This broken-down old woman, her delusions and the slow abridgement of her life . . . these have been given to me to record as others record journeys across Tibet or Patagonia or the thighs of a dozen women," Bennett the Writer says. Under Bennett's watchful eye, these throwaway bits and pieces from daily life take on a kind of cultural resonance: they are fragments from which he constructs a picture of his civilization—impoverished, bewildering, and incidentally hilarious.

As the world knows, Bennett was part of the Oxbridge foursome—the others were Peter Cook, Dudley Moore, and Jonathan Miller—who, in their mid-twenties, launched themselves into the theatrical scene with "Beyond the Fringe" (1960), a satiric revue that at one stroke sent British comedy caroming off in a new direction. Bennett has never lost his revue mentality. He is an entertainer. He likes jokes. He likes his scenes to pop: short, sharp, with big comic finishes. His characters veer toward the cartoonish. This does not mean that his world is without truth but that the profound sadness of his characters, in their comic detachment, comes without punishment. As a character in the play says, "by unfeeling we are saved."

Despite the director Nicholas Hytner's clever staging and Mark Thompson's fine set design, which offers as the show's first image not the van but Bennett's sun-dappled front window, "The Lady in the Van" is itself essentially a revue, featuring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the two bickering Bennetts as a supporting slapstick turn to the performance of Maggie Smith, who also began her brilliant career in revue, in the fifties. Dame Maggie, who's meant to look grimy but spends most of the evening in what comes dangerously close to blackface, plays Miss Shepherd the way Jerry Lewis used to play Dean Martin's spastic sidekick. She flounces around with a funny walk, her low-cut black sneakers splayed out in a kind of wacky fourth position, and her tongue darts in and out of her mouth like a lizard's. These mannerisms are gold at the box office; the audience loves Smith's baroque shtick. But, to my taste, a little of this gooney unreality goes a long way. However, her hauteur and her fluting voice release the comedy underneath Shepherd's galling grandiosity and megalomania. "I was the cleanest of my mother's children, particularly in the unseen places," she tells Citizen Bennett in her opening speech. Bennett is the maestro of this combination of swagger and ignorance, which is particular to the lower English orders. He also reports her saying, "I've got good topography. I knew Kensington in the blackout."

In the course of the play, Miss Shepherd badgers Bennett with requests, fouls his garden, screams at him to turn off his classical music, sends him on errands, and tries to enlist him in various loony schemes, like her electoral bid to become Prime Minister ("Would I have to move into Downing Street or could I run things from the van?" she asks), while never once saying "Thank you" or "I'm sorry." After falsely accusing Bennett of stealing the keys to her newly acquired second car, a Reliant Robin, she says, "I've no time for sorry. Sorry is for God." When Citizen Bennett asks her if she'd like a cup of coffee, she says, "No, I don't want you to go to all that trouble. I'll just have half a cup."

At one point, Bennett is goaded beyond endurance by a social worker, and splutters at her, "Mary, as you call her, is a bigoted, blinkered, cantankerous, devious, unforgiving, self-centered, rank, rude car-mad cow!" But of the many feelings Miss Shepherd brings into Bennett's life—fury, hatred, pity, compassion—perhaps the greatest is the feeling of mystery. In dramatic contrast to his mother, a frail, depressed, and finally demented white-haired absence he calls "Mam" (well played by Elizabeth Bradley), Miss Shepherd is stimulating in her extraordinariness. At the end of her life, as the facts of her story are flushed out into the open, Bennett learns that as a young woman she'd been an accomplished pianist whose gift was lost to her ambition to become a nun. "It was a mansion to me, music," she says, in one of the play's best speeches. "Heard in the spirit possibly. Only it worried me that playing came easier to me than praying." When, through no fault of her own, a motorcyclist ran into her uninsured van and was killed, she drove away from the scene; her subsequent lifetime of retreat had its origins in that one freak moment.

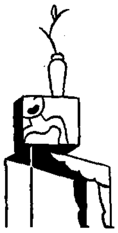
Throughout the play, Bennett insists that he is "not a carer." He wants no points for being good or decent. Miss Shepherd's demise sends the two Bennetts into a vaudeville of mixed emotions. Rightly suspecting that she has died in her fetid van, they inch toward it, with the Writer pushing the Citizen out of the way. "Give over," Citizen Bennett says. "This could be really sad." The Writer counters, "I know. I can't wait." By this clever device, Bennett finds a way both to mythologize and to demystify himself and his subject. Miss Shepherd is buried, then resurrected only to boss Bennett around from the grave. "Be bold anyway," she tells the congenitally timid author. "I came into your garden for three months, I stayed for fifteen years. Mr. Bennett, do you know what that is? It's the last laugh." Well, not really. When the van, painted in what Miss Shepherd called "crushed mimosa," is hoisted out of the garden, Hytner and Bennett collaborate on a proper ascension. With an effective ironic fillip, the Writer reports that Miss Shepherd's only lasting legacy to the chic street was moths, whose larvae flourished in the van's dank squalor, while the scrupulous Citizen Bennett concludes that what we've been shown onstage is not "the whole picture," adding, "This has been one path through my life. . . . Lots of other stuff happened. No end of things." He goes on, "And that's true. I'm not making it up." The Writer smiles as he listens to the Citizen's special pleading about the truth and fullness of his life. "Of course not," he says and, as they exit upstage, puts his arm benevolently around his other half. This cunning image is a fun-house-mirror reflection of Miss Shepherd's subterfuge. She lied in order to survive the shame of failure; Bennett, the play suggests at the finale, lies in order to survive the shame of success. ♦

ON TELEVISION

AGAIN AND AGAIN

Fortysomethings in love.

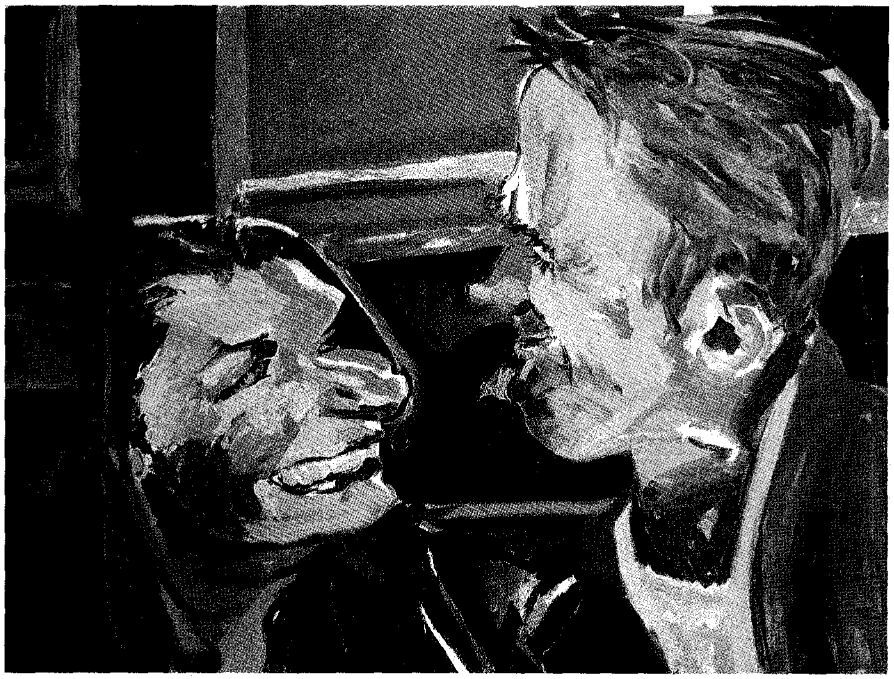
BY NANCY FRANKLIN



SUPPOSE you're sitting in the hot seat on "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" and the question is "Which TV show is about two divorced forty-year-olds falling in love?" The possible answers are (a) "Once and Again"; (b) "Now and Again"; (c) "Time & Again"; and (d) "America's Funniest Childbirth Videos." You'd be smart to use me as your lifeline, because since September I have spent many hours explaining to people that "Once and Again" is the one by the people who did "Thirtysomething" and stars Sela Ward, the really pretty dark-haired woman who used to be in "Sisters," and is all about how hard it is to have a relationship if you're a single parent and your ex is still in the picture; and that "Now and Again" is the one by the guy who did "Moonlighting," and is about a guy who dies in an accident and is sort of brought back to life and is not allowed to disclose his identity to his family or they'll all be killed; and that "Time & Again" is the one with Jane Pauley and uses archival news footage and, by the way, my brother Andy is the executive producer. No need to split your million with me; just being able to play a role in dispelling the confusion that has reigned throughout the land these last few months is reward enough.

Nothing ever quite took the place of "Thirtysomething," which went off the air eight years ago—or, more to the point, no other show picked up where it left off. Before "Once and Again," there hadn't been a show aimed so specifically at the now fortysomething demographic. For the many people who found "Thirtysomething" 's characters unbearably self-absorbed, talky, and whiny, that absence may have amounted to a breath of fresh air; the rest of us, when we heard that Marshall Herskovitz and Edward Zwick, who created "Thirtysomething," had a new show coming last fall, couldn't wait to see it. "Once and Again," which is on ABC and will return on January 24th, after a monthlong break, revolves around the romance between Lily (Sela Ward), the co-owner of a bookstore and the mother of two, who has recently separated from her husband, and Rick (Billy Campbell), an architect and the father of two, who has been divorced for three years. In the first episode, Lily and Rick meet at their children's school, go out on a couple of dates (they have their first kiss while standing between their hulking S.U.V.s), and end up at Lily's house, where, having agreed that it is too soon to have intercourse (their term, not mine), they do "other things" (their term, not mine), until they are barged in on by her kids and her ex. Apparently, by the second episode it is no longer too soon; in a ten-minute scene at the end, Lily and Rick consummate their infatuation. (And a very embarrassing scene it is, too; at one point, a few minutes after the proceedings have ground to a halt owing to circumstances beyond Rick's conscious control, and he is lying on his side cuddling her, we see Lily's face suddenly light up, and we realize, whether we want to or not, that Rick's Game Boy just got fresh batteries. It is my ardent wish never to see this happen again on TV.)

At the time, it seemed unreal that these two people, with their clamor of busy schedules and their emotional baggage, would tumble into bed so quickly, but it's fortunate that the show got sex out of the way early, because by now the answer to the question "Will they or won't they?" would have been "Who cares?" There is very little chemistry between Ward and Campbell, no matter how much Lily and Rick protest to the contrary. Despite the show's being riddled with lines like "When can I see you?" and "I have to see you," and despite the fact that the stars are both very attractive, there's no feeling of urgency about their romance. Not to mention that Lily and Rick are, so far, uncommonly uninteresting. A character's being the owner of a bookstore might, in another show, indicate that the character is deep or eccentric or passionate, but it seems to signify absolutely nothing in the case of Lily. She even says of herself, "All I ever wanted, I think, was to be safe." Rick, too, has a bland, erased quality about him; his winning habit of calling his son, Eli, by the nickname "E" is about as far as his personality goes.



Ward and Campbell as Lily and Rick: juggling children, jobs, ex-spouses, and romance.

PHILIP BURKE

The lack of chemistry between (and within) the stars isn't necessarily fatal,

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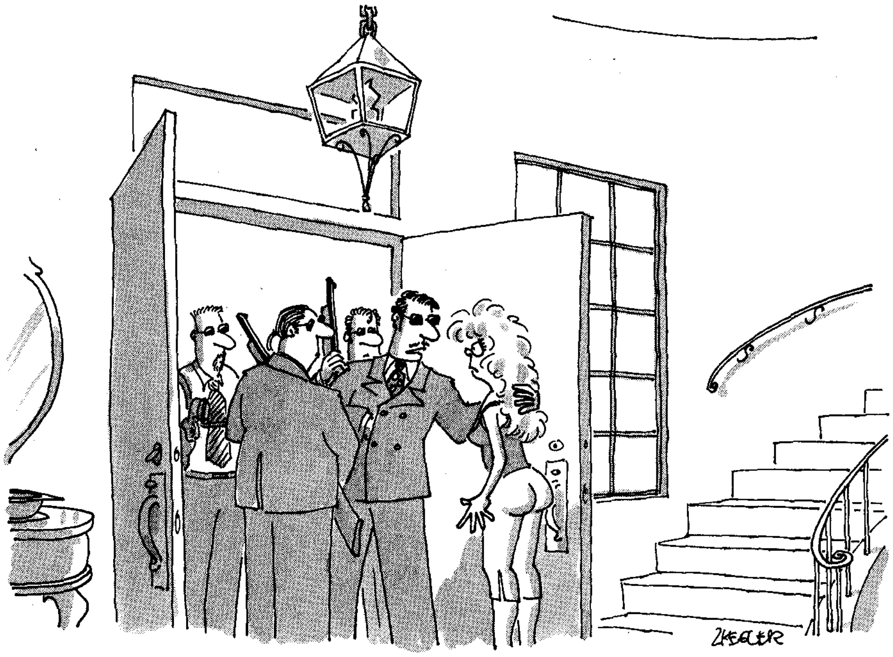
though, because "Once and Again" isn't about romance; it's about all the things that stand in the way of romance when you're forty and divorced and have children—children who say things to you like "I don't want you to marry anybody but Daddy," as Lily's nine-year-old daughter says to her after her first date with Rick. It's a problem with implications both profound and mundane, and "Once and Again" is very accurate—accurate to a fault, often—on the thousand little things that interfere with trying to get on with your life when you already have a life. The show could be retitled "Conflicting Schedules." This is a representative phone conversation between Lily and Rick:

RICK: When do I get to see you?
LILY: When do you want to see me?
RICK: Tomorrow? No, wait—I have to pick up Eli after practice. What about Thursday?
LILY: Oh—parent-education night.
RICK: Oh, God, I forgot. Friday—no, I have the kids on Friday.
LILY: Same here.

In a way, the real star of "Once and Again" is Alexander Graham Bell—his invention is in virtually every scene of the show, and it symbolizes everything that connects Lily and Rick and everything that keeps them apart. But, true as it may be that life after children happens mostly on the phone, having to *watch* the constant telephonic cooing and complaining makes you impatient and makes the characters seem, well, unbearably self-absorbed, talky, and whiny. (Rick's ex-wife, Karen, played with restraint by Susanna Thompson, is an exception; her wounds are largely private, and she comes closest to fitting the definition of a grown-up.) To make matters worse, the action is often interrupted by deathly serious closeups of the individual characters, shot in black-and-white against a blank backdrop, explaining themselves to someone off camera, as if they were in a documentary about themselves. As you sit there face to face with them, one on one, you're in the position of a shrink—and you feel like sending them a bill.

Still, there's no question that "Once and Again" is put together by people with acute powers of observation and an unerring sense of family psychodynamics. They *get* it. They get the way parents can keep on messing with your head long after you've got gray hairs of your own; they get the way parents have to live with the feeling that whatever they do their children will invariably resent them for it. Herskovitz and Zwick have a gift for depicting the mercurial life of teen-agers, and in Julia Whelan's fourteen-year-old Grace, Lily's older daughter, they have a worthy successor to the character that Claire Danes played on "My So-Called Life." (Winnie Holzman, who created that show, is a producer of "Once and Again"; Herskovitz and Zwick served as producers on her show.) Whelan alone is a reason to watch the show—and it's a sure bet that her character, and not Sela Ward's, is the one that women viewers most fully identify with. (Ward, after all, used to be a model. There are maybe eight women who identify with that.) Grace is awkward and hypersensitive—her face seems always to be turning various shades of red—and her relationship with her mother is in constant flux. She watches her intently, studying her for clues about how to be a woman, and yet she rolls her eyes or makes a sarcastic remark in response to practically everything her mother says or does. There is such a thing as being too good at playing a teen-ager, but Whelan has been able to keep her character realistically unpredictable and maddening and sympathetic from one moment to the next. Evan Rachel Wood, who plays Rick's twelve-year-old daughter, Jessie, is also very good; she's sweetly attentive to her father, in an almost wifely way, and, unhealthy as that may be, it's heartbreaking when this child's ideal of family life is shattered.

"Once and Again" is very much a product of its time; these fortysomething parents admit their mistakes and talk to their children in a way that their parents—members of what Tom Brokaw, in his two best-sellers, has dubbed the "greatest generation"—never talked to them. That constitutes some sort of progress. But, for all the talking the boomer parents in "Once and Again" do, they don't seem to listen to themselves: Lily says, in one of those self-conscious black-and-white scenes, "I keep wondering when to officially consider myself middle-aged.... I think it's when you spend more time thinking about all the bad things that have hap-



"Sorry, Sylvia, but your mother's long-term care has been going on just a little bit too long."

pened instead of all the good things that might." This isn't the voice of an adult; it's the voice of a big baby living a so-called life.

GLENN GORDON CARON'S "Now and Again," on CBS, doesn't brim with the delicious giddiness of his eighties romantic comedy, "Moonlighting"—it would be hard to match the badinage that flew between private detectives Cybill Shepherd and Bruce Willis. But "Moonlighting" was tender and wistful at its core; its earliest, and best, episodes were built around the idea that neither of these two people really had what he or she wanted, which was each other. "Now and Again" has that quality, too, but it comes from a different source: in this show, the main character, Michael Wiseman, a forty-five-year-old insurance salesman, has what he wants and loses it—his family and, indeed, his life. In the first episode, Wiseman, played by John Goodman, is pushed onto the subway tracks as he's going home from work and is killed by an oncoming F train. His body is never found—that's because it was spirited away by government agents who needed his brain for an experimental man they were constructing. You know how that is.

When Wiseman—or Wiseman's brain—comes to, he finds himself repackaged in a buff, boyish body twenty years younger, and employed by, and a virtual captive of, the federal government. (This new Wiseman is played with a good deal of charm by Eric Close.) His keeper is the archly droll Dr. Theodore Morris (Dennis Haysbert); he and Wiseman spend a lot of time sparring, as Wiseman tries to break free of the confines of his new existence and Dr. Morris tries to keep him focussed on his mission. (The exasperated Dr. Morris says to Wiseman at one point, "What do I have to do to get you to accept your death? Kill you?") Wiseman is always pushing the envelope, always trying to find ways to reach out to his wife (the very appealing Margaret Colin) and daughter (Heather Matarazzo, of "Welcome to the Dollhouse"), to do the things for them he would do if he were alive. It's a tricky business, though—the closer he gets to them the more he places them in jeopardy. But this tension, this desire, is what gives the show warmth as well as suspense. It manages never to be creepy, because it's not about the hold that the dead have on the living; it's about irrational, enduring love and faith. "Now and Again" is truly goofy, and it somehow makes all the sense in the world. ♦

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THE CURRENT CINEMA

THE IDIOT AND THE ADONIS

Film bios of two distinctly American virtuosos.

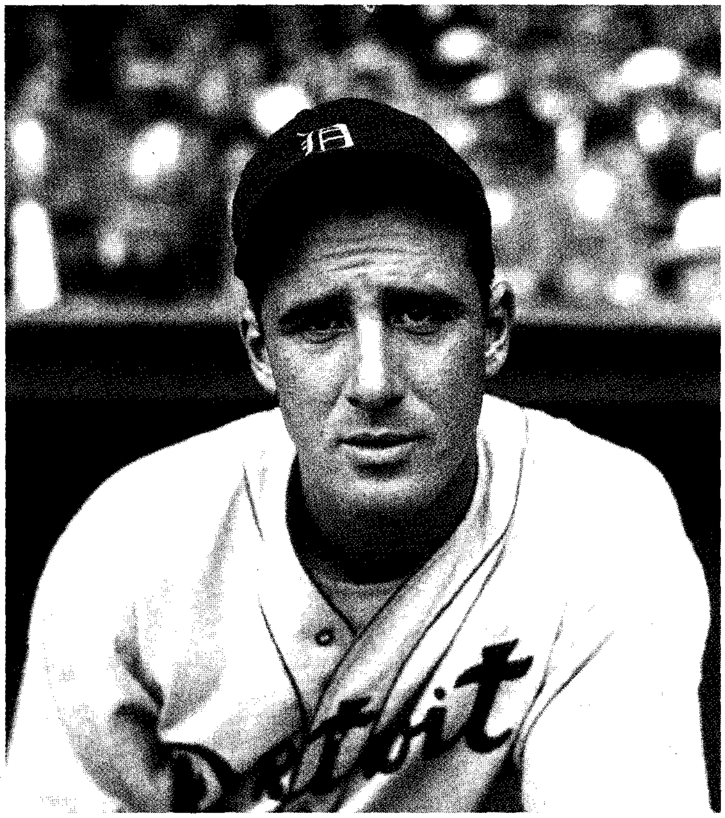
BY DAVID DENBY

STUPIDITY may follow hard on the heels of love as the most pervasive of human qualities, but how many artists have the curiosity, or the moral toughness, to explore it as a theme? Flaubert knew that the witless could be sinister, and Graham Greene, in such books as "The Third Man" and "The Quiet American," suggested that intellectual myopia, linked to innocence, could make for enormous trouble. "Mr. Death: The Rise and Fall of Fred A. Leuchter, Jr.," the new documentary by the gifted black-comedy filmmaker Errol Morris, may not be as good as a Flaubert or Greene novel, but it's remarkable nonetheless. The movie is about a specific kind of American dimness: the cult of expertise, which, by its very nature, blinds the person who practices it to every form of knowledge save the one that he understands. The expert is a virtuoso; he exercises his special skill with love. Why should he hold himself accountable for anything that falls outside his gaze? "Mr. Death," which touches on Holocaust denial and complicity in mass murder, is comic in tone but tragic in implication.

Morris's dunce hero is a Massachusetts man who spent years repairing and perfecting execution equipment—electric chairs at first, and then gallows and lethal-injection machines. Fred Leuchter was apparently very good at what he did. As he explains to us, with excruciating precision, the old electric chairs were untidy and dangerous. They took too long to kill, sometimes cooking the prisoner ("The Green Mile," if anyone is interested, serves up quite a stew); they endangered the guards, who were forced to stand close to the highly conductive urine released by the prisoner as he lost control of his bodily functions. Leuchter says all these things with appropriate concern for human comfort, safety, and dignity. Why should someone who is being put to death by lethal injection have to look at the ceiling? Why couldn't he have a television set, or even some pictures fixed to the wall of the execution chamber? Why not, indeed? Suppressing a giggle, one can only agree with Leuchter as he argues for more humane executions. But we can't help noticing that such evident right-mindedness affords him a safe haven for his obsession with putting people to death. Leuchter is both logical and unnervingly dislocated. He finds himself shocked that certain states think him qualified to build a gallows and even a lethal-injection machine. Why should his work with electricity qualify him to do work with poisons? Leuchter grows almost indignant. But we can see quite easily why penal officials in different states wanted to use him: Leuchter regards electrical current, rope, and chemicals less as methods of killing than as elements in a series of vexing mechanical problems. He shields himself from doubt and from guilt: a man can use his skill and do good work. Leuchter took the jobs.

Morris, who began interviewing Leuchter on camera in 1992, tells the story of Leuchter's career in rough chronological order. At the time of the principal interview, Leuchter appears to be in his mid-forties, a rabbity, unprepossessing man, with big teeth and big glasses. Physically, he's a commonplace object, but Morris weaves a sardonic visual fantasia around him, immersing us in the malign materiality of his life, restaging both unusual and ordinary events from his career—his daily routine, his fiddling with execution equipment, his non-stop jags of coffee drinking. Morris traps Fred Leuchter in the ironic flattery of his attention. He probes him, undermines him. At times, the movie dissolves into pure contemplation; past and present merge, and Leuchter is given a cruelly mythic presence as an ageless quintessential fool. But, in the end, Morris is not entirely unsympathetic. Leuchter may be fatuous, even blind, but he means no harm, and that is his tragedy.

It only becomes clear in the middle of the movie that Morris's account of Leuchter's career is retrospective—that by the time of the first interview Leuchter had fallen from eminence as a much-in-demand designer of electric chairs. The transforming event came in 1988. A neo-Nazi named Ernst Zündel, on trial in Canada for publishing false history and inciting racial hatred, commissioned Leuchter to make a trip to Poland—a forensic expedition that would "prove," once and for all, whether there were gas chambers in the concentration camps. Zündel is just a routine Nazi thug, crude and jocular, but he was shrewd enough to play on Leuchter's vanity, and Leuchter became his patsy. With Zündel footing the bill, Leuchter went to Majdanek and the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex with a small camera crew (we see some of the videotaped records of his expedition). He entered the ruins of Birkenau's Krema II, one of the large gas chambers in which hundreds of thousands died, and brought home small chunks of the interior wall. The chunks, turned over to an unwitting chemist in Massachusetts, were pounded to bits, and whatever cyanide residue might have been lodged in the wall surface got enormously diluted. The evidence of cyanide that turned up was insignificant, and since Leuchter found no ventilation systems or gasketed seals, he concluded that no mass executions by gas had taken place. "The Leuchter Report," which detailed these conclusions, was adopted as a central document by Holocaust deniers all over the world, and Leuchter himself, speaking at pathetic "conferences" of nuts and anti-Semites, became a mock celebrity. But in America, as a consultant to state penitentiaries, he was ruined.



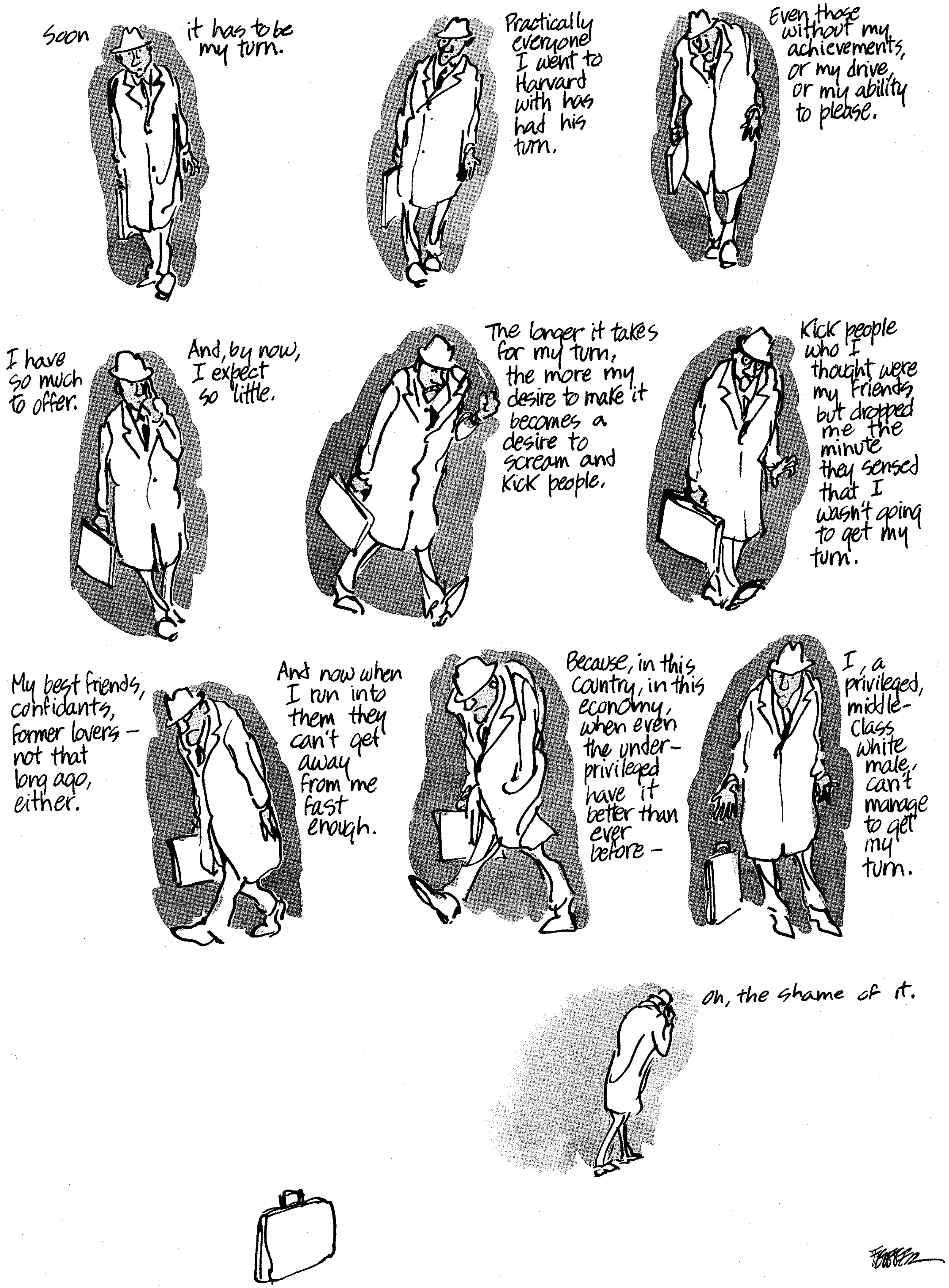
A genuine hero: Hank Greenberg, the right-handed slugger who hit fifty-eight homers in 1938, refused to rise to the bait of ethnic taunts.

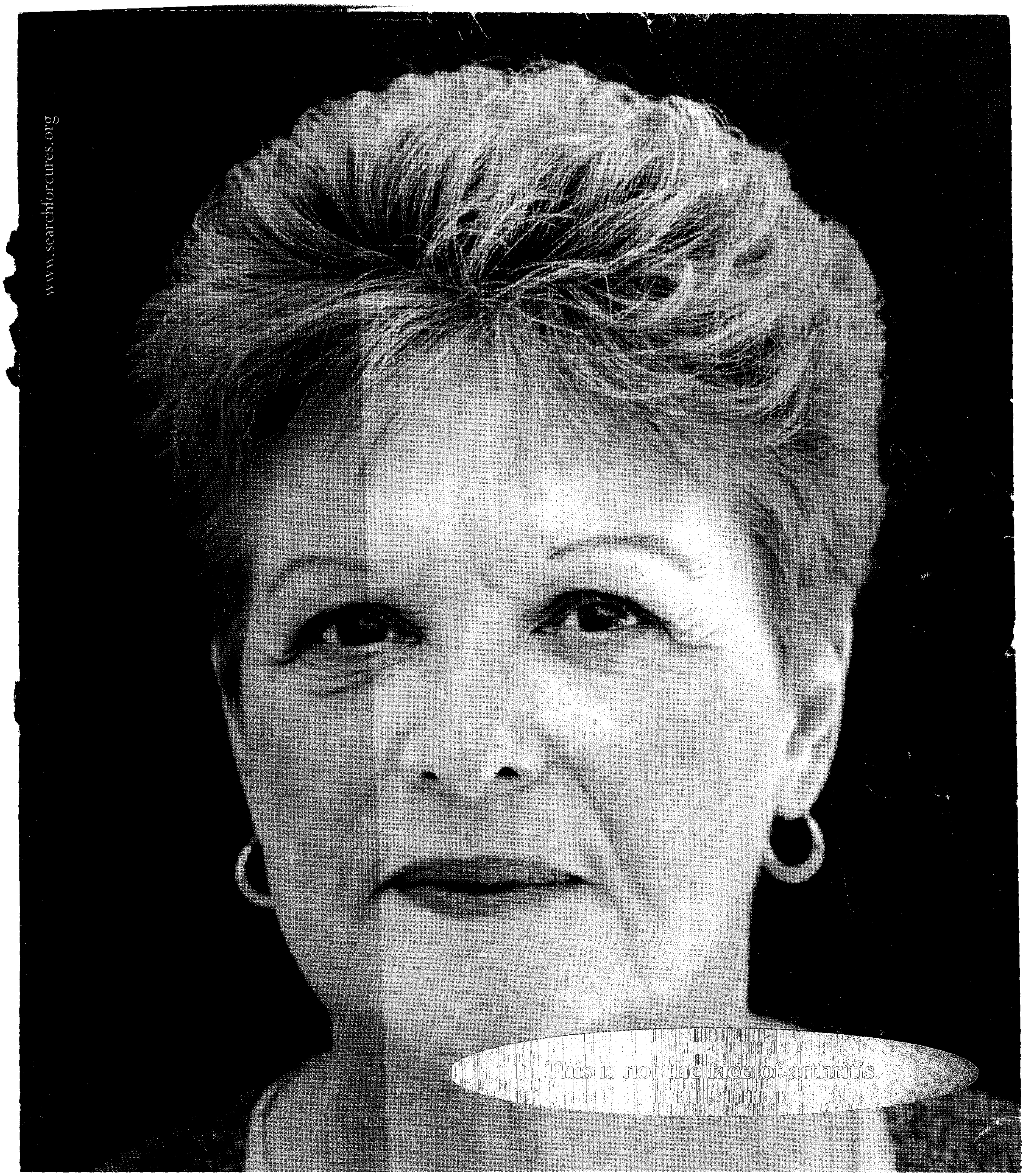
AP WIDE WORLD

Morris brings in Robert Jan van Pelt, the Dutch-born expert on Auschwitz, who speaks with passionate indignation of Leuchter's blunders, and Morris exposes the idiocy of Leuchter's scientific "proof." But Leuchter, in his own mind, remains a hero of truth, as defiant as Martin Luther, and baffled by his fall from grace. Is he evil? By the end of the movie, we realize that Errol Morris has done more than deliver a blow to the Holocaust deniers. Fred Leuchter's stupidity has an almost revelatory significance. He is, obviously, similar in temperament to the type of functionary in Nazi Germany who carried out murderous orders. He is also a man who can see that four straight lines joined at right angles make a rectangle. What he can't see is the ground that the rectangle lies on or the relation of rectangles to circles, triangles, or trapezoids. In other words, he's an American of a very familiar sort. Watching him, I thought of the more fanatical of the President's congressional enemies during the Lewinsky scandal, the Hutchinsons and Barrs and McCollums, who were crestfallen when the rest of the country persisted in regarding the mess in human, rather than legal, terms. Leuchter represents the extremes of legalism, scientism, moralism—of any one-eyed activity that rules out as much evidence as it takes in and pursues the vanity of expertise to an end that may be utterly false.

THE most wonderful thing in "The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg"—a very different kind of documentary—is the emerging portrait of the young Greenberg, a tall, gangly, rather anxious-looking adolescent from the Bronx who became, by degrees, the astonishingly self-assured and good-humored Jewish Adonis of the Detroit Tigers, a right-handed slugger who drove in a hundred and eighty-three runs in 1937 and hit fifty-eight homers in 1938. Here is a genuine American hero—a great athlete who refused to rise to the bait of ethnic taunts, a hard worker, smart, and rich, too. In an era before athletes made much money, Greenberg was the first player to earn a hundred thousand dollars; as his career waned he married the department-store heiress Caral Gimbel, and stayed in baseball as an executive rather than retire, in the morose style of ballplayers of the period, to deliver beer or sell used cars. "The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg," written and directed by Aviva Kempner, is less a movie than a mash note, and at times the Jewish self-celebration (complete with Mandy Patinkin singing a Yiddish version of "Take Me Out to the Ball Game") becomes a little thick. I will admit, however, that I had to wipe away a tear or two. I have never heard so many heterosexual men (including Walter Matthau, Alan Dershowitz, and Senator Carl Levin) speak of another man with such open love. And the picture rises to a moving conclusion: in Greenberg's last year on the field, 1947, when his body was failing, he held out his hand to a young black ballplayer—Jackie Robinson, making his way through his torturous first season. ♦

THE BACK PAGE BY JULES FEIFFER


Soon it has to be my turn.
Practically everyone I went to Harvard with has had his turn.
Even those without my achievements, or my drive, or my ability to please.
I have so much to offer.
And, by now, I expect so little.
The longer it takes for my turn, the more my desire to make it becomes a desire to scream and kick people.
Kick people who I thought were my friends, but dropped me the minute they sensed that I wasn't going to get my turn.
My best friends, confidants, former lovers – not that long ago, either.
And now when I run into them they can't get away from me fast enough.
Because, in this country, in this economy, when even the under-privileged have it better than ever before –
I, a privileged, middle-class white male, can't manage to get my turn.
Oh, the shame of it.

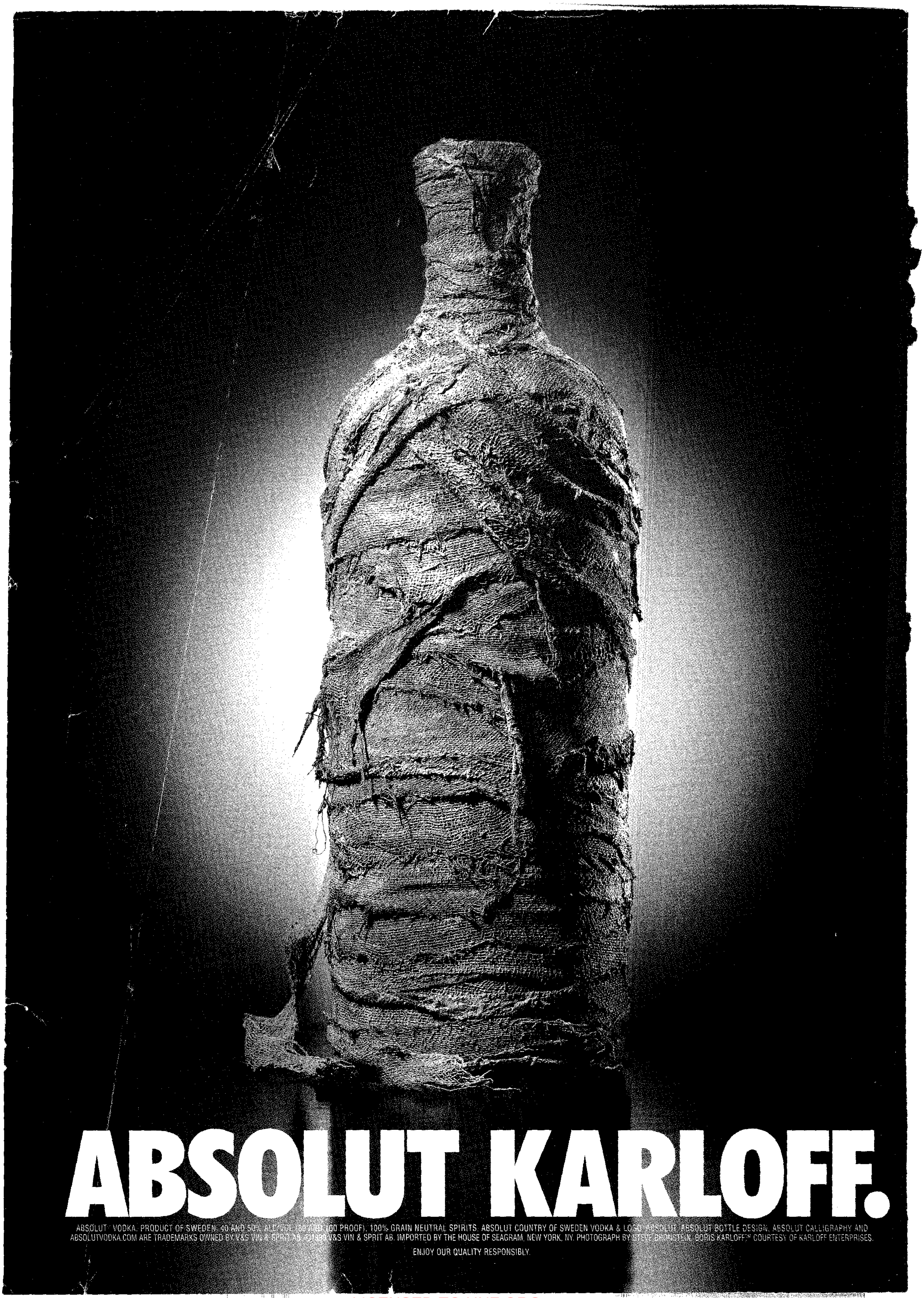


www.searchforcures.org
This is not the face of arthritis.

It's the face of Laurie Stollery, gardener, golfer and someone who walks at least 12 miles a week. Arthritis used to slow her down, but it doesn't anymore. A new medicine developed by America's pharmaceutical company researchers helps to alleviate pain and swelling in a remarkable new way. Now Laurie can plant flowers and go for long evening walks whenever she wants to. Today, there isn't a cure for arthritis, but pharmaceutical researchers get closer every day. So people like Laurie Stollery can move and stretch, and live their lives to the fullest.

America's Pharmaceutical Companies

Leading the way in the search for cures



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